CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES
AND
MT. SAN ANTONIO
COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

#91-0044
Increasing Disabled Student Retention by Implementing a Curriculum Based Vocational Assessment Process

FUNDING CATEGORY & AWARD | ELIGIBLE PROGRAM | PROJECT CATEGORY
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Grant = $19,000 | C --- Special Learning Needs of Ed/Dis | 

PROJECT PRODUCT | PROJECT TOPIC #1 | PROJECT TOPIC #2 | ACADEMIC SUBJECT
--- | --- | --- | ---
Assessment | Vocational | Vocational | 

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This project propose creating and subsequent field-testing of two major vocational assessment programs to meet the challenges which face individuals with disabilities, their vocational instructors, and the support service personnel involved. The first program is a Multi-Sensory Career Exploration course. The second program is a system to monitor students with special needs while they are attending vocational classes.
Increasing Disabled Student Retention by Implementing a Curriculum-Based Vocational Assessment Process

Vocational assessment strategies which are currently in use are not adequate for students with disabilities. A career guidance course which reveals career opportunities utilizing teaching methods which are more successful for individuals with disabilities is sadly lacking. Systematic monitoring of student progress in the vocational classroom in order to identify and provide support services is currently non-existent. The consequence is a group of students with disabilities, who waste time by taking courses to find out that they were not interested in the subject matter. They are unable to complete course requirements, fail courses, do not meet career or educational goals, and eventually drop out of educational programs contributing to the low retention rates of underrepresented disabled students in educational programs.

We are proposing creation and subsequent field-testing of two major vocational assessment programs to meet the challenges which face individuals with disabilities, their vocational instructors, and the support service personnel involved. The first is a Multi-Sensory Career Exploration course exclusively for individuals with disabilities using teaching strategies which are more effective with this group of students. The second program is a system to monitor students with special needs while they are attending vocational classes. This system will rely heavily on collaborative input and assessment activity from vocational instructors and support service personnel. A collaborative approach between vocational instructors and support service staff would facilitate communication, create innovative intervention strategies, and individualize instruction as well as support services to the needs of the student while satisfying course requirements. The student will experience success in the classroom, remain in school, matriculate towards a realistic educational goal, and eventually succeed in employment.

Target populations for this project include students with disabilities who are new or returning to the community college, and who have not identified a major. Disabled students who are already enrolled in a vocational education program and who have specified a major would also be included in the second goal of the project. Community college vocational instructors and Disabled Student Programs & Services staff will also be involved.

Evaluation of the project will include an appraisal of the progress report form developed to monitor student progress. The progress report form will be assessed on its usefulness to DSP&S staff in identifying and providing support services needed by the student. Appraisal of the Multi-Sensory Career Exploration course will be based on our target student population's
ability to produce more realistic career aspirations.

The project's purpose and preliminary results will be distributed in writing and verbally through consultations to a minimum of 3 community colleges and through presentations to campus DSP&S and vocational education departments, staff development workshops, at state conferences, and submitted for publication in ERIC and the CAPED newsletter Communique.
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1. Specific Educational Program Being Addressed

PROGRAMS & SERVICES ADDRESSED

The main thrust of this proposal is to increase the enrollment and retention of disabled students in vocational and transfer education. Specifically, the following priorities are addressed:

1a. “Enrollment, retention and transfer of underrepresented students in both vocational education and transfer education,”
1b. "Retention practices for disabled students," and to a lesser degree,
1c. “Dropout prevention for at-risk youth."
2. Specific Problems Being Addressed

SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

Students with disabilities in public education are examined psychologically, sociologically, academically and subsequently placed into classes. Little consideration is given to the student's abilities to function successfully in those classes, however. At the post-secondary level in particular, there is virtually no evidence of on-going assessment of disabled students. Woods, Boyer, and Sedlacek (1987) found that 67% of the post-secondary institutions which use basic skills assessments to determine level of support services and accommodations required by learning disabled students did not use the assessment results for placement of students in vocational and/or academic classes.

As a result, there is a significant group of individuals with disabilities who experience extreme difficulty in college courses. This difficulty arises out of: a) inability to perform at expected levels, b) disinterest in subject matter, and/or c) personal problems interfering with progress in vocational programs. Due to lack of on-going systematic assessment these difficulties are not identified early enough. Ultimately, the student earns a below than average grade, drops the course, or drops out of school. Many disabled students continue attending the college without a definite focus or goal; changing majors several times, failing the same courses over and over again without requesting any assistance--and not receiving any.

Decisions relative to student placement into vocational classes, amount of support services required, progress in vocational programs, and job placement upon completion of a vocational program are made subjectively (Woods et al., 1987). The importance of having a systematic, comprehensive and relevant vocational assessment system for making sound decisions that impact disabled students' vocational and academic experiences has been expressed by many researchers (e.g. Cobb, 1988; Peterson, 1985; Swisher, 1990; Woods, et al. 1987). Our premise is that a systematic vocational assessment would assist in the identification and subsequent provision of support services and increase retention rates among disabled students.

To retain any student, the student must feel successful in the classroom and have academic and/or vocational goals. Incremental successes should be linked to gains towards these educational goals. Many students with disabilities do not have educational goals. The few who have are not succeeding in classrooms due to lack of timely and appropriate support services.

Typical community college students at Mt. San Antonio College who have declared a goal of earning a degree or certificate are expected to "matriculate" in order to reach their educational goal. The process of matriculation requires the student to obtain an Educational Plan. The Counseling Department recommends 3 ways to obtain an Educational Plan.
1. Enroll and complete an Educational Guidance Class.
2. Have an Educational Advisor assist in making a semester by semester plan in the Advisement, Career and Transfer (ACI) Center.
3. If majoring in a vocational area, meet with an instructor in that department and have the instructor assist in making a semester-by-semester plan.

These methods are often inappropriate for disabled students. First and foremost, matriculation depends on the student having an educational goal. The primary reason many disabled students do not have educational goals is lack of appropriate career guidance instruction and testing. Educational Guidance classes are often taught in a seminar method with paper and pencil vocational career interest inventories as primary methods of identifying career and educational goals. Paper and pencil inventories, the tool most often used in the community college system for assessing students, have been disparaged based on lack of validity. Many variables interfere with the results. Some factors include test anxiety on the part of the student, reading and comprehension level of the student, and the inability of paper and pencil tests to simulate real life situations. The seminar method of instruction is also difficult for some disabled students, for example those with hearing impairments and individuals who have learning disabilities based on audiological deficits. Methods 2 and 3 in the preceding section could allow a whole semester to pass prior to the student meeting with the advisor or instructor again.

In summary, we lack the methodology for on-going monitoring of student progress prior to the end of the semester, while they are in the classroom; to identify and prescribe a support service before it is too late, before the semester is over and the student fails or drops out. The student continues to take courses and fail them as a result of absence of support services which could have prevented some, if not all of these failures.

A program which reveals career opportunities utilizing teaching methods which are more successful for individuals with disabilities is sadly lacking. The consequence is a group of disabled students who waste time by taking courses to find out that they were not interested in the subject matter or are unable to complete course requirements, eventually dropping out of vocational programs and contributing to the low retention rate of underrepresented students.

A collaborative assessment approach between vocational instructors and support service staff would facilitate communication, create innovative intervention strategies, individualize instruction as well as support services to the needs of the student while satisfying course requirements, and ultimately increase retention rates.

Proposed Solutions

We are proposing creation and subsequent field-testing of two major vocational assessment programs to increase the retention rate of individuals with disabilities in educational programs.

1) The first is a Multi-Sensory Career Exploration course exclusively for individuals with disabilities, using teaching strategies which would be more effective with this group of
students such as video tapes, computer-aided career inventories, classroom observations field trips, guest lectures, aides, interpreters.

2) The second program is a system to monitor students with special needs while they are attending classes. For the field test of the monitoring system, 4 vocational programs at Mt. San Antonio College are targeted; Electronics, Horticulture, Early Childhood Education and Mental Health Technology. The rationale for selection of these programs was based upon disabled student enrollment in these vocational programs is high thus selecting student subjects would be facilitated. The monitoring system will rely heavily on collaborative input and assessment activity from vocational instructors and support service personnel.

The Multi-Sensory approach to career exploration will assist disabled students in making realistic educational goals based on tangible information. Because information will be presented in a variety of modalities, the student's understanding of the different career options will be facilitated regardless of their particular learning limitation. Having established an educational career goal, the student and his/her advisors will be better equipped to make sound classroom placement decisions. Thus matriculation will be facilitated and retention will be more apparent.

Retention of disabled students will also increase due to the development of the monitoring system which will promote early intervention for those students who need it, before experiencing failure. Those students will experience success in the classroom and subsequently remain in school.

As mentioned in the preceding section, vocational assessment strategies which are currently in use are not adequate for some disabled students. In order to obtain some guidelines in the development of these programs, research into alternative vocational assessment methodology has uncovered a curriculum-based vocational assessment (CBVA) model championed by Albright and Cobb (1988a). Albright and Cobb's CBVA model is the option of choice for several reasons. First, disabled students are assessed by multiple methods over time, with paper and pencil tests comprising only a small part of the total assessment program. Second, CBVA techniques require a collaborative effort between vocational instructors and support services personnel, the individuals most involved in the student's scholastic experiences. Third, these same individuals are charged with the task of conducting CBVA activities.

The assessment strategies are determined according to specific vocational course curriculum and objectives. CBVA procedures include developing a system to expose the student with disabilities to various vocational programs offered at the school as well as careers he or she could pursue. CBVA techniques advocate a system to monitor students while attending vocational programs to increase the chances of success in that program. Lastly, a CBVA process encourages the development of strategies to transition the student from community college to a 4-year university or to employment.

From the model described above, Albright and Cobb (1988b) developed a training program for secondary school personnel titled Assessment of Students With Handicaps in Vocational
education: A Curriculum-Based Approach. Realizing the possibility of adapting CBVA to suit a post-secondary environment, Colorado State University (CSU) in conjunction with California State University, Long Beach and the University of Wisconsin-Madison is currently studying the effectiveness of CBVA training materials and products developed by Albright and Cobb (1988b) in both secondary and post-secondary institutions. This research endeavor entitled “Curriculum-Based Vocational Assessment Research Project” (Cobb, 1988) is funded by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services of the U.S. Department of Education. The project is examining the level of implementation of the CBVA procedures in 12 secondary and post-secondary institutions in California, Colorado and Wisconsin. One of the goals the project seeks to meet is “to determine the relative effectiveness and perceived quality of curriculum-based vocational assessment (CBVA) as a process for use with students with handicaps who are enrolled in mainstream secondary and post-secondary vocational education programs,” (p. 16).

Mt. San Antonio College (Mt. SAC) is one of the post-secondary institutions in California that was selected to review the training program developed by Albright & Cobb (1986) and suggest revisions to suit a community college. As a result of these tasks, implementation strategies were developed. However, due to lack of funding these strategies could not be pilot tested. If the current project is funded the strategies developed will be pilot-tested and subsequently implemented college-wide. Additionally, the present project's results will be incorporated into the larger CSU venture. A more detailed description of the other goals and objectives of the CSU study is contained in Cobb (1988).

The CBVA model contains strategies for accomplishing on-going assessment of disabled students that have not yet been used in a community college setting with disabled students. For example, the development of a mechanism for exposing students to a variety of occupational fields prior to the student enrolling in a vocational program, would increase the chances of the student making a decision based on experiential interest rather than speculative interest. Another example: A system for monitoring students while participating in their vocational program is not currently available. The formation of such a system would assist in the identification of support services prior to a student experiencing severe negative consequences in the classroom and increase student retention. CBVA methods would provide accurate assessments of student progress based on actual vocational classroom curriculum.

Adoption of a CBVA process in a community college could promote communication between instructional and support personnel. Duties related to the instruction, placement into classes, identification of support services, and placement into competitive employment would be facilitated as CBVA processes provide an accurate base of information which is individualized to the needs of each student. Disabled students would ultimately benefit from implementation of CBVA methods as they achieve a higher level of success in completing vocational courses, meet educational goals, and successfully transition to employment as a result of proper identification of strengths, interests, and abilities.
3. Population To Be Served

TARGET POPULATIONS

Target populations for this project would include:

Multi-Sensory Career Exploration Course

(1) For the initial field test, 20 students with disabilities who are new or returning to Mt. SAC and who have not identified a major. Future ventures would include 25-35 students per semester.

Monitoring Student Progress

(1) Students with disabilities who are participating in one of four targeted vocational education programs at Mt. SAC:
   a. Early Childhood Education
   b. Mental Health Technology
   c. Horticulture
   d. Electronics

Initially, a field test of 40 students (10 from each area) will be targeted. Future endeavors could include up to 60 students per semester in a variety of vocational education programs.

(2) Faculty, Directors, Deans from the four areas mentioned above, Disabled Student Programs & Services staff (DSP & S), and individuals from the Learning Assistance Center will be instrumental in the development of the assessment strategies as well as carrying out some of the assessment activities described earlier. After the initial field test in the four vocational areas, CBVA methods would be expanded to include other vocational education programs.
4. Objectives

[NO “OBJECTIVES” ACCOMPANIES THIS DOCUMENT.]
5. Workplan Narrative

[NO “WORKPLAN” ACCOMPANIES THIS DOCUMENT.]
6. Expected Outcomes

Outcomes of Objectives

1. The creation of the 2 unit Multi-Sensory Career Exploration course will provide disabled students a more effective alternative to the regular Guidance course which is mainly taught as a seminar. Many disabled students find the seminar method of teaching difficult. As a result, disabled students are misplaced in vocational education courses they are not interested in or able to complete. The course utilizes alternative teaching strategies such as videos, field trips, and guest lecturers. Diversified teaching strategies employing various senses is more effective for students with disabilities. More realistic decisions about career aspirations as well as placement into classes will ensue, increasing the success and retention rate of underrepresented disabled students educational programs.

2. With the identification of support services prior to the disabled student experiencing detrimental consequences in vocational classes, results will indicate an increase in the retention and subsequent completion of vocational as well as the educational goals. A decrease in amount of unproductive time the student is spending at Mt. SAC also will be evident.

3. Collaborative development and implementation of transition strategies should result in a more successful matriculation program by identifying appropriate options for underrepresented disabled students; transfer to 4-year university or placement in employment.

4. Increased communication between faculty in vocational education, DSP & S staff, and other support personnel will ensue as a result of the proposed collaborative effort in the development of a CBVA system.

5. Increased efficiency and effectiveness in carrying out job duties related to instruction, identification of support services, placement into vocational programs, and transition into the work force will result as a consequence of the proposed project.

6. Globally, faculty, staff, and students at other local community colleges would benefit similar to the preceding outcome as a result of consulting with Mt. SAC project staff.

b. Project Impact

It is apparent that college students with disabilities do not complete their vocational programs. One of the challenges facing community colleges today is to increase the retention and success of underrepresented groups in vocational classes. Some of the students fail and/or drop out of vocational programs because certain needs are not identified or given, or perhaps
due to loss of interest in the occupational area once exposed to it. Additionally, many studies indicate that individuals with disabilities have a high rate of unemployment and lack of stability once they do secure employment. The appropriateness of placements into classrooms and employment made on behalf of individuals with disabilities is partly to blame for these unfortunate consequences. Lack of communication and collaboration is another strong factor in poor classroom retention of disabled students and/or poor grades.

To determine vocational as well as academic placement of students into classes, provide support services and place students in competitive employment, most community colleges rely on paper and pencil inventories and/or commercially prepared vocational evaluation systems. The limitations of the using these methods have been elaborated upon elsewhere.

In developing a more comprehensive, collaborative vocational assessment process, community college personnel responsible for the instruction, placement and provision of support services of students with disabilities will be better equipped to make decisions and provide services which are more truly reflective of their students’ abilities, interests and values. Consequently, the students will experience success in the classroom, remain in school, matriculate, meet educational goals and succeed in employment.

At this point in time, there has not been a vocational assessment system designed for use in community colleges which is as comprehensive as the CBVA approach described earlier. Application of a CBVA process will alleviate the unproductive consequences that the present community college student with disabilities experiences.

c. Continued Support

On-going funding of this project is not essential to its longevity. Once the field-study is completed, the assessment procedures described earlier will be expanded to include more students with disabilities. In relation to the Multi-Sensory Career Exploration course, as long as enrollment substantiates the course, it will be adopted as a regular college course offered once per year.

After initial implementation and field testing with the 4 vocational education areas mentioned earlier, membership in the advisory group will be rotated to include other vocational areas while maintaining current collaboration with original members. This would expand the vocational areas where CBVA procedures would be implemented. Methods and strategies developed as a result of CBVA will be substituted for outdated methods currently practiced and incorporated into job descriptions of individuals involved in assessment and provision of support services.

d. Project Adaptation

The potential for adaptation to other institutions is very high. CBVA methods use resources which are already available at most campuses. The essential key to adaptation is having an advocate for CBVA methodology who will coordinate available resources and personnel,
develop a few short forms, and keep data on progress and problems. The Colorado State/Cal State Long Beach project has been disseminating information and arousing interest in CBVA among local Community Colleges. So the interest is there. At this point, what is needed is training/consulting personnel. One of the major objectives of this proposal is to provide consultation to other community colleges. The project abstract will be distributed to local community colleges with an invitation to call the Project Director for more information. The Course Syllabus and monitoring progress forms developed will be available to all community colleges interested in the project. In-person consultation to local colleges will also be available. A presentation will be submitted at the CAPED conference which will attract more attention to the project.
7. Evaluation Plan

Evaluation Plan

Objective 1: Objective is achieved if:
1.1) curriculum for Career Exploration Course is developed by April 1992.
1.2) students who completed the Career Exploration Course have a clearer, more realistic career aspirations.
1.3) course continues beyond funding period and is accepted as part of the regular college curriculum.

Objective 2: Objective is achieved if:
2.1) forty (40) students who have not pinpointed a career goal and/or major are identified.
2.2) twenty (20) of the students identified in 2.1 are enrolled in the Career Exploration Course.

Objective 3: Objective is achieved if:
3.1) a list of a minimum of 10 skills, qualities, and abilities is achieved from each department involved the field-test: Early Childhood Education, Mental Health Technology, Horticulture, and Electronics.
3.2) these lists contain items which can be measured and compiled into a progress report form individual to each department.
3.3) forty students with disabilities are identified, and, with their vocational instructors, agree to complete the progress reports.
3.4) the progress report filled out by both vocational instructor and the 40 students provides an accurate measure about how the students are performing in their classes.
3.5) the progress report is utilized to identify and provide support services.

Objective 4: Objective is achieved if:
4.1) attendance at the quarterly advisory group meetings includes a least 1 representative from each vocational area and DSP & S staff.
4.2) collaborative efforts result open discussions on identifying actual problems and solutions in disabled student assessment and retention.
4.3) the team develop actual strategies not currently used to identify employers who will hire Mt. SAC’s disabled students upon completion of a vocational program.
4.4) updating of course curriculums to match employer’s expectations occurs.

Objective 5: Objective is achieved if:
5.1) short article about project is submitted to CAPED for publication in their newsletter by December 1992.
5.2) Project abstract and preliminary results are distributed to community colleges in the area by September 1992.
5.3) A minimum of 3 local colleges receive assistance in the area of developing assessment strategies to increase student retention according to CBVA methods.
8. Dissemination Plan

Dissemination

Methods, procedures, and any products created as a result of this project will be submitted to ERIC. Due to the commitment of Mt. SAC to the larger CSU project, all techniques, strategies, and products will be used in CSU's final project report. All opportunities to present at local, state and national conferences will be welcomed.

One of the major objectives of this proposal is to provide consultation with a minimum of 3 community colleges who are interested in increasing disabled student retention. Additionally, the project abstract and results will be available to all interested parties.

After the initial field test, project efforts will include other vocational areas at Mt. SAC in the development of a college-wide CBVA process. Therefore, faculty and staff in other vocational areas will be included in implementing a full-scale CBVA process after the initial field test is conducted. Other distribution efforts within the college include oral presentations complete with handouts during departmental meetings to all vocational education divisions about project and results, development of a presentation with literature especially for a staff development workshop, and submission of an article for the Grapevine; the monthly faculty and staff newsletter.
9. Budget Narrative

[NO “BUDGET NARRATIVE” ACCOMPANIES THIS DOCUMENT.]