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Developing Postsecondary Education Programs for Individuals With Intellectual Disabilities

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, Long Island University, 2003

BS, Plattsburgh State University, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Individuals with intellectual disabilities have higher rates of unemployment compared to other population groups. There is limited knowledge regarding the development of postsecondary education (PSE) programs that provide employment skills training and education to individuals with intellectual disabilities. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate the development of PSE programs for those with intellectual disabilities. Dewey's experiential learning theory was the framework for this study. Invitations to participate were sent to directors and faculty of all PSE programs in one northeastern U.S. state. Ten directors and faculty agreed to be interviewed. The research question addressed the perceptions of PSE program directors and faculty on how to develop a PSE program to support the education and employment needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Coding and thematic analysis were used to analyze the interview data. Data analysis revealed three primary themes: (a) a commitment to the principle of normalization as part of the program's mission, (b) a reliance upon the traditional student body to serve as peer mentors, and (c) fidelity to continuous program development to provide high-quality experiences to program participants. With greater understanding of current practices and operational issues, directors and faculty may be able to engage in strategic planning to increase program enrollment and effectiveness. Participation in successful PSE programs may improve the quality of life of individuals with intellectual disabilities and enable them to become active members of their community.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children and my husband. First, to my children Shea, Connor, Teagan, and Meadow—I hope this will teach you to never give up on your goals until you achieve them. And to my best friend and husband, Dr. Adam McGlynn, I could not have done this without you. You knew exactly what I needed throughout this process. You pushed and prodded even when I wanted to give up because I felt I was missing out on "life." You held my hand throughout this roller coaster and showed your love and support. But most importantly, you believed in me.

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To my colleagues, thank you for all the ongoing positive words of encouragement to keep me focused on the end goal.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

As a group, individuals with disabilities experience high levels of unemployment. Research shows unemployment rates in the United States are the highest among individuals with disabilities (Wilson et al., 2017). Among all individuals with disabilities, those with intellectual disabilities experience the most unemployment. To address this issue, postsecondary education (PSE) leaders have developed programs to increase the independence and job readiness of individuals with disabilities. Researchers have found that those who have completed a PSE program are employed at higher rates compared to those who have not (Manikas et al., 2018; Scheef et al., 2018).

In this study, I explored how PSE programs are developed to aid individuals with intellectual disabilities in their ability to gain employment. Studying the development of these programs may provide insight that stakeholders at other postsecondary institutions can use to develop their own programs. Access to such programs may enable greater numbers of individuals with intellectual disabilities to attend postsecondary programs to gain skills to increase their employability. In Chapter 1, I provide the background and state the problem and purpose of the study. The chapter includes the nature of the study, research question, conceptual framework, and definitions of key terms. Last, I examine the assumptions and limitations of the research as well as the significance of this work in potentially bringing about positive social change.

Background

Many U.S. young people with intellectual disabilities want to continue their education past high school but are hampered by a lack of institutional support. In a

longitudinal study, 24% of young adults aged 16 or older with intellectual disabilities completed a college placement or entrance exam, demonstrating the desire to continue their education beyond what is offered within the public school setting (Lipscomb et al., 2017). These students are graduates of kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) public schools who are eligible to receive education services up to the age of 21 under the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). IDEA requires transition planning through Individual Education Plans (IEPs). However, many plans do not address postsecondary education goals, independent living skills, and employment goals (Francis et al., 2018). Another barrier is that after completion of their K-12 education, most individuals with disabilities experience long wait times for services from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) (Francis et al., 2018). These barriers are problematic because individuals with intellectual disabilities require additional time and education in employment skills to give them an equal opportunity for employment.

The lack of postsecondary education programs has left many individuals unengaged in employment skill development while waiting for OVR services (Francis et al., 2018). If these individuals were able to attend a postsecondary education program, they could obtain employment skills that would better prepare them for employment which could be supported by the OVR. The creation of more postsecondary education opportunities could enable more individuals with intellectual disabilities to obtain employment (Hall et al., 2021). In the study state, on average 1% of high school graduates each year are individuals with intellectual disabilities, according to the state's bureau of special education. There is a gap in knowledge regarding how postsecondary

education programs can be developed to create more opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities to gain needed employment skills (Hall et al., 2021; Lipscomb et al., 2017).

Problem Statement

The problem was that little was known about how PSE programs are developed to provide employment skills training and education to individuals with intellectual disabilities. This lack of knowledge limits the number of programs in existence to serve students in need (Becht et al., 2020). As education leaders do not have a starting point to launch program development, an absence of knowledge regarding PSE program operation means that there are a limited number of PSE programs in operation. A consequence is that employment skill development may not be accessible for individuals with intellectual disabilities who are interested in furthering their education to obtain meaningful employment.

Examining how these programs are developed may provide program leaders with the knowledge they need to create other PSE programs. At the time of this study, in the northeastern target state, there were 18 postsecondary education programs located on college campuses with two of the programs limiting enrollment to those students who were partnered with specific local school districts (Think College, 2019). On average, these programs admit 10-12 students per year between the ages of 18 to 26. Data from this northeastern state's Department of Education show that in 2020 there were more than 1,000 students with intellectual disabilities between the ages of 18 and 21 who did not take full advantage of the availability of K-12 educational offerings that were available to

them. However, there were fewer than 150 available spots in PSE programs for interested students. PSE programs are limited in the number of students they can admit each year based on the total number of students an individual program can support. Programs in this northeastern state typically have between 4 and 30 students enrolled in their 2- and 4-year programs (Think College, 2021). Less than 50% of the eligible applicants are accepted into these programs (Think College, 2021). Reasons include the overall small size of PSE programs and the availability of spots being based on the number of program graduates from the previous year.

The absence of employment skill development for individuals with intellectual disabilities is concerning. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), 19.3% of individuals with disabilities were unemployed, a rate that is more than double the percentage of those without disabilities. Francis et al. (2018) found that the high unemployment and underemployment rates are often due to the long waiting list for support services. Those who can gain employment often need to seek out services from state vocational rehabilitation agencies (Alsaman & Lee, 2017). Stakeholders have created PSE programs that do not offer degrees and that are housed at colleges and universities as one way to provide individuals with intellectual disabilities the skills they need to obtain employment (Whirley et al., 2020). However, Becht et al. (2020) found that there are too few programs to serve the population of individuals with intellectual disabilities who are seeking to attend a PSE. If there was a clear way to identify the core components of existing PSE programs, it could allow for more programs to be created (Becht et al., 2020).

Since the reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) in 2008, educators at several postsecondary institutions have developed programs to provide students with intellectual disabilities employment and independent living skills (Baker et al., 2018). In 2008, there were 52 programs with funding granted under the HEOA. The number of programs has increased by 500% since then (Baker et al., 2018). However, even with the increase, there were not enough programs to serve the individuals in need, and little was known about how these programs provide employment and independent living skills, based on my review of the literature.

There is some research on the impact of auditing college-level classes on transition participants (Burgin et al., 2017). Other researchers have explored peer mentoring as a way to support transition participants in engaging in campus activities (Giust & Valle-Riestra, 2017). Although this research provides insight on the impact of PSE program participation on students with intellectual disabilities, a clear picture of how these programs and their activities were first developed was lacking (Bumble et al., 2019). Data from this northeastern state's Department of Education Bureau of Special Education in 2014-2015 showed that 1,566 17-year-old students with intellectual disabilities were receiving services from a K-12 educational agency under IDEA. By the time this cohort group reached 21 years of age in 2018-2019, there were only 124 students identified as receiving services. With limited access to services or extended wait times to receive them from the Office of Rehabilitation Services, the question remains as to how these individuals will be able to gain and maintain employment to improve their quality of life while waiting for services to begin (Alsaman & Lee, 2017; Francis et al.,

2018). By exploring the creation and operation of PSE programs, I identified commonalities in practice. The findings from this study may provide program leaders with the knowledge they need to develop more of these transition programs to meet the needs of students with intellectual disabilities in their community. For the purposes of this study, individuals with disabilities were defined as those with mild intellectual disabilities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate how PSE programs are developed to provide employment skills training and education for individuals with intellectual disabilities. I analyzed qualitative data collected from interviews to gain a deeper understanding of how PSE programs at universities are developed to provide students with the educational experiences needed to improve employment skills. The knowledge gained from this study may be beneficial for leaders of colleges and universities seeking to increase the number of PSE programs; they may be able to draw upon the experiences of the participants of this study in developing their own programs.

Research Question

The purpose of the research was to investigate and gain an understanding of how PSE programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities are developed to support employment skill acquisition. To accomplish this purpose, I conducted interviews with PSE program directors or faculty (LeGros et al., 2015). This research may allow for a greater understanding of the most effective ways to develop PSE programs that focus on employment skill development based on the perspectives of program creators, leaders, or

faculty. The following research question underpinned this study: What are the perceptions of PSE faculty and program directors on how to develop a PSE program to support the education and employment needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the experiential learning theory (ELT) of John Dewey. I applied this theory because it illustrates how practitioners can use learning experiences to develop an educational system (see Laverick et al., 2020). Dewey's ELT will be reviewed in Chapter 2 as to how it promotes educational system change while supporting independence in learning, living and employment. In transition planning, there are stages of learning that require self-motivation (Laverick et al., 2020). This self-motivation is needed for adult learning because the individual will need to develop independence. ELT was appropriate for the exploration of learning as an independent process. Fostering independence may enable individuals with disabilities in a PSE program to be successful after graduation as they will have the ability to continue to learn on their own. Individuals with intellectual disabilities need to learn, explore, and understand career choices, problem solving, and interpersonal relationships both during and after participation in a PSE program (Laverick et al., 2020). An ELT approach also clarified how PSE program directors in the study had addressed barriers in developing and designing their programs. Most program directors must develop their programs without guidance from others through a trial-and-error process (Wessel, 2018). Insight on how PSE programs are created and operated may enable leaders at other universities to develop these programs (Green et al., 2017).

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative study, I analyzed data collected from interviews to identify the processes and practices that need to be in place for program leaders to develop a PSE program that provides employment skills to individuals with intellectual disabilities. All participants were asked how they developed the PSE program at their current location. The questions posed help to gain a better understanding of how the programs focus on instruction and supportive practices for employment (see Babbie, 2017). I wanted to elicit qualitative information to understand program development (see Burkholder et al., 2016). I collected qualitative data by conducting interviews with individuals who had developed or who were leading these PSE programs to gain a deeper understanding of how employment skill development is supported at the postsecondary level (see Babbie, 2017).

The study findings encompass the in-depth perspectives of the program directors and faculty on what is necessary for program leaders to develop PSE programs. In analyzing the interview data, I identified common themes (see Saldaña, 2016). This work may lead to positive social change by providing the knowledge required to develop new PSE programs that may allow individuals with intellectual disabilities to further their education and employment. By further developing their employment skills, individuals with intellectual disabilities may be better able to participate in the labor market.

Definitions

Apprenticeship or internship: A strategy to support employment and career options for individuals to learn a set of skills in a practical workplace setting (Wilson et al., 2017).

Employment skills: Skills that are practical and necessary for an employee to carry out job functions, such as problem solving and communication (Nevala et al., 2019).

Hybrid or mixed model: A model in which students with intellectual disabilities enroll in specifically designed classes for the PSE program and classes from the traditional university curriculum with instructional support (Alqazlan et al., 2019).

Inclusive model: A model in which students with intellectual disabilities are educated alongside their nondisabled peers through university programs and are provided with educational support such as tutoring, technology support, and educational coaching (Alqazlan et al., 2019).

Intellectual disabilities: Individuals who possess a below-average IQ and struggle in the development of cognitive and social skills. Historically, the population has had low employment rates following secondary school graduation with many living in poverty (Miller et al., 2019).

Postsecondary education (*PSE*): A continuation of education at a community college or 4-year college or university campus where academic, living skills, and employment skills are taught in an environment that is age appropriate for learners (Scheef et al., 2018).

Quality of life: The development of skills in areas (e.g., education, career development, friendship, learning to live independently, and leisure activities) that fosters an overall sense of being more independent (Miller et al., 2018). The individual feels that they are in a favorable work environment that allows them to contribute at a high level of participation (Al-Rashaida et al., 2018).

Separated model: A model in which students with intellectual disabilities are educated in classes that are specifically designed for students in the PSE program (Alqazlan et al., 2019).

Transition plan: A plan that is part of the kindergarten to age 21 educational system that supports and directs an individual with a disability into adulthood; the plan includes a pathway to employment (Wehman et al., 2018).

Assumptions

In conducting this study, I assumed that the participants were honest and accurate in sharing their perspectives regarding the development and operation of their PSE programs. I also assumed that the participants were qualified to explain the development of the employment curriculum and other aspects of the PSE program at their current location. Another assumption was that there may not have been shared experiences that would allow for the discovery of common practices in the development of PSE programs. As well, there may not have been a singular phenomenon in the development of these programs even when they could have similar practices. By stating these assumptions, I hope to foster confidence in the findings of the study.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I investigated how PSE programs are developed to provide employment skills training and education to individuals with intellectual disabilities in one northeastern state. Self-advocacy is a conceptual framework that was considered for this study. It is vital that students understand their abilities, know their legal rights, and understand and communicate their understanding of authority (Baig, 2021). However, this study focused on the development of PSE programs that provide employment readiness for those enrolled in the program; thus, a conceptual framework based in experiential learning, such as ELT, was more appropriate for this work than self-advocacy. PSE programs that were targeted in this study are housed on college or university campuses. The purpose of the study was to understand how PSE programs are developed. There are other postsecondary education programs that address employment skill development in the target state; however, these programs may not offer the same community-inclusive practices that are provided to the individuals who attend programs housed on a college campus. I included programs that are located at either public or private universities. Because this study provides insight on employment skill development for individuals with intellectual disabilities, the results of this study may be applicable to the development of PSE programs at higher education institutions throughout the United States.

Limitations

I examined PSE programs that are located within one northeastern state. There were potential challenges with recruiting participants. At the time of the study, there were

18 programs in the northeastern state; however, not all 18 programs were on university or college campuses or had an open application process. Some programs only accepted individuals from specific school districts. This design could have impacted how the PSE programs were developed. Also, it could mean the development process for those programs was different than those that had an open application process and accepted those from outside the local community.

I focused on how program leaders create PSE programs to address employment skill development for individuals with intellectual disabilities. One challenge was the time required in coordinating and interviewing directors and faculty members from PSE programs. Participation in this study was not compensated; thus, recruiting program leaders to participate was a challenge. To address this challenge, I was flexible in conducting interviews based on the schedules of participants. Furthermore, although employment skill development is mostly uniform across states, some communities may host industries looking for specific skills, which would require a PSE program in that community to target those skills for development. This might lead to the lessons learned from this research being less applicable to programs that have a more general approach. In further discussing possible limitations, there were no identifiable ethical or data storage concerns. I developed the interview questions, so no access to existing data or survey instruments was needed. The members of my dissertation committee reviewed the interview questions employed in this study and provided feedback to address any potential forms of bias. Students in PSE programs and their parents were not included in this study.

Significance

Individuals with disabilities may need additional years of education and skill development to obtain employment. For this reason, IDEA (2004) allows these individuals to stay in school until the age of 21, but this allowance can vary from state to state. Extending transition plans to a PSE placement such as a trade school or college/university can give the individual the additional time to develop the employment skills needed to increase their quality of life (Carter et al., 2017). However, there are not enough PSE programs in operation to meet the employment skill development needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities in part because little is known regarding how these programs are developed (Bumble et al., 2019).

In this study, I explored the development of university-housed PSE programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The knowledge from this study may be used by leaders and staff at other postsecondary institutions to develop new programs to meet the employment skill development needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Access to PSE programs can improve the job prospects of these individuals. Ryan et al. (2019) found, for instance, that PSE programs helped students with intellectual disabilities gain employment in at least one paid position after graduating from the program. Transition programs that go beyond K-12 focus on self-efficacy to meet the high aspirations that individuals with disabilities and their family members have (McFadden et al., 2015; Quigney, 2017). This study may provide the knowledge necessary for stakeholders to create more of these programs and foster positive social change for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the high unemployment rates of individuals with intellectual disabilities, and presenting data from one northeastern state, I showed that there is an inadequate supply of PSE programs. I also discussed the lack of knowledge regarding the development of these programs. With greater knowledge of how PSE programs are created and operated, for individuals with intellectual disabilities at colleges and universities, academic directors and instructional staff may be better able to develop these programs at other institutions of higher learning. Having explained the potential significance of this work, I will now transition in Chapter 2 to a discussion of what scholars have learned from existing PSE education programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem investigated in this study was the lack of understanding in how PSE programs are developed to provide employment skills and experiences for individuals with intellectual disabilities (Hall et al., 2021; Lipscomb et al., 2017). The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how PSE programs housed at colleges and universities are developed to support the education and employment skill development of individuals with intellectual disabilities. In Chapter 2, I explore the literature on the impact of PSE programs in developing employment skills among individuals with intellectual disabilities. Before reviewing the literature, I discuss the literature search strategy and conceptual framework for the study.

Literature Search Strategy

The process of finding scholarly research on employment skill development through a PSE program for students with intellectual disabilities started with inputting the search term *students with disabilities* in EBSCO and ProQuest within the Academic Search Ultimate, SAGE Journal, Education Research Starters, Education Sources, and ERIC databases. Subsequent searches included the terms *postsecondary education*, *university*, or *college*. Based on the results, I then used other terms, such as *intellectual disabilities*, *severe disabilities*, *professional schools*, *life outcomes*, and *employment* in the same databases. Additionally, a search was conducted to obtain information on the general process of program development in higher education. In addition, I used Google Scholar to identify researchers who have studied postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities. The research from these scholars provided me with extensive knowledge

of the current educational practices in PSE programs that are designed to achieve

program outcomes.

There has been limited research conducted on individuals with disabilities

attending postsecondary institutions. Hall et al. (2021) indicated that there is little known

about how PSE programs are developed for those with intellectual disabilities. Most of

this work concerned individuals identified as students with learning disabilities or those

with emotional disabilities. To narrow the search, I used the search term *intellectual*

disabilities. Several search results also yielded scholarship related to individuals with

autism. For this study, I searched for articles addressing PSE programs for students with

intellectual disabilities but did not exclude those addressing PSE programs that were

developed for individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism. Many of the scholarly

articles cited in this study that have been written in the last 5 years have addressed

practices that have been implemented in a PSE program and the impact these practices

have on student outcomes.

The last search term used was the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (*ADA*). The

ADA (1990) was essential to include because it ensures that individuals have equal

access under the protection of the law to postsecondary education programs. However,

the focus of this study was on how these programs may educate students to understand

their employment rights under the ADA.

Conceptual Framework

In this qualitative study, I used experiential learning theory as the framework to

investigate the development of PSE programs. These programs are developed to support

the continuing educational needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities as well as to foster individuals' independence and employment (Baker et al., 2018). Students enrolled in the PSE programs are exploring and gaining firsthand experiences that students without disabilities experience at the postsecondary level. Students involved in a PSE program are provided with guidance and support in exploring career paths. Students are encouraged to try new activities and experiences to explore their own understanding of personal interests (Kelley & Buchanan, 2017).

Experiential learning theory comes from Dewey's (1938) work. The theory explains that individuals learn context within an experience. Individuals acquire knowledge through the practice of doing rather than hearing or reading about the concept (Laverick et al., 2020). This theory focuses on students being active learners. Dewey's theory laid the foundation for other theorists to expand upon his work. The key proposition of the theory is that students learn from experiences and can apply what they have learned for future experiences that Dewey identified as "the experiential continuum" (p. 33). This is a significant factor in the process of adult learning. Individuals take what they have learned from past experiences and see how they can apply that in the future.

In a PSE program, students with disabilities are already aware of what their interests and dislikes are. Through the development of their program, students can take classes that they are interested in as well as others that are required. By taking classes outside of their areas of interest, they learn adjustment, adaptation, and other skills that they can apply to the workplace. Adolescents and adults learn from experience and choose to advance their knowledge in a field based on these experiences (Cmar &

McDonnall, 2021). PSE programs encourage students to explore and participate in a variety of educational experiences to help them in planning and preparing for employment. Cmar and McDonnall (2021) found that there are only short-term benefits to searching for skills and employment opportunities. In contrast, if students are engaged and actively participating in developing the skills they need, they are more likely to be successful in employment skill acquisition. Furthermore, in the use of experiential learning, individuals are developing open-minded habits and limiting biases based on preconceived notions. They are learning both in the classroom and in the community about employment options and skill requirements (Bonati & Dymond, 2019).

Using experiential learning theory, I closely examined how these PSE programs are developed in supporting employment skill development to help individuals with intellectual disabilities gain meaningful employment after completing the program. Another factor to consider in the design and operation of these programs is the extent to which the principles of andragogy drive instructional practice. Andragogy, concerning the teaching of adult learners, is rooted in relevant, problem-based experiential learning (Machynska & Boiko, 2020), which aligns with the goal of developing employment skills for these adult learners with intellectual disabilities. The results of this study may assist programmers in creating future programs to support employment skill development. In this study, I examined the development of the PSE program curriculum and the perspectives of the postsecondary program directors and faculty regarding the creation of the program.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables

In this literature review, I begin by identifying current practices in transition planning for those individuals with intellectual disabilities; transition planning serves as the bridge to potentially entering a PSE program. From there, I review program development in higher education and what is currently known about PSE programs that are designed to support the development of independent living, learning, and employment skills. The literature review includes discussion of the following topics: (a) the need for more PSE programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities that develop the skills needed for employment, (b) current practices of PSE programs for students with intellectual disabilities, and (c) barriers that are impacting PSE programs' ability to help students achieve their desired employment outcomes.

The Need for Expanded Transition Programming

Today, students have a variety of choices after graduating from secondary education programs. They can graduate by completing a vocational program to prepare them to gain employment in the field. Some students seek employment that does not require advanced education or skill development. Others continue with their education by attending a postsecondary college or university. While attending college, they are furthering their education to apply new skills towards a career path. However, as currently implemented, most transition planning does not enable students who have intellectual disabilities to direct their own path into adulthood (Pallisera et al., 2016).

Transition planning needs to incorporate evidence-based practices in accordance with IDEA; one such practice that is often not followed is student involvement in career

awareness (Dukes et al., 2017; Mazzotti et al., 2016). Those who receive career awareness as part of transition planning have a higher likelihood of gaining employment or choosing to attend a PSE program after finishing high school (Mazzotti et al., 2016). Morgan et al. (2017) found that educators are the ones developing transition plans that guide these individuals into adulthood. These plans are educator directed and not student directed. This leaves the student with limited opportunities to make decisions for themselves regarding transition planning (Francis et al., 2018; Readhead et al., 2019). If there were more PSE programs, students would have more opportunities to explore the options available at PSE programs through their transition services (Whirley et al., 2020).

Individuals with disabilities are graduating from high school and wanting to attend postsecondary institutions to further their education at higher rates (Houtenville & Boege, 2019). Additionally, Lipscomb et al. (2017) found that individuals who were identified with intellectual disabilities and multiple disabilities needed PSE programming. Their longitudinal study found that these individuals are unable to follow their transition plan after graduation due to a lack of support and education for employment. There needs to be access to a variety of programs during transition planning to ensure there are opportunities for all individuals who are graduating or have graduated. McFadden et al. (2015) and Quigney (2017) demonstrated further support for the need for transition programs beyond K-12 public schools by finding that programs which support the ongoing development of self-efficacy for individuals with disabilities help these individuals meet their high aspirations in adulthood. The lack of postsecondary educational programing for individuals with disabilities leads to the individual feeling

they are not prepared to be part of an inclusive work environment. They understand they need additional support and instruction to be part of the work force, but current transition practices leave them ill prepared as only 1 in 5 students with autism, an intellectual disability or multiple disabilities obtain employment in high school (Lipscomb et al., 2017).

Potential Benefits of Postsecondary Education Programs

The creation of more PSE programs would not only provide more opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities but help to ensure these individuals can be successful when provided with employment opportunities. Employers are looking for individuals who need limited training or support in the workplace. When supportive instruction in career awareness and skill development is provided, higher employment retention rates occur. PSE programs are likely able to support skill development to increase retention rates. Wehman et al. (2018) suggested using phases in supportive employment to increase retention rates. These phases include getting to know the individual who is looking to be employed, developing a place for employment for that individual and then supportive instruction through training. Lastly, ongoing job retention services should be established through collaboration with OVR. This allows for PSE programs to focus more on career development as opposed to job placement (Zhang et al., 2018).

In today's competitive job market there are limited employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities. With access to PSE programs individuals can develop independent learning skills in an inclusive environment while continuing to

focus on the ability to generalize the skill into the work environment (Petroff et al., 2020). PSE programs are aligned to meet the model for integrated competitive employment under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014. Individuals will benefit from learning in the natural learning environment where they can practice and be supported in learning how to generalize skills in the workplace (Taylor et al., 2020).

Program Development in Higher Education

In higher education when new programs are created, or existing programs are redesigned it is done by stakeholders identifying a need for a change. Norris and Martin (2021) state the key to developing a successful program is to avoid focusing on the short-term goals and to establish collaborative partnerships to address the need for change. As discussed in chapter 1, the lack of opportunities in employment skill development for individuals with intellectual disabilities who are leaving the kindergarten to age 21 school setting demonstrates a need for change. Concurrently, the expertise of college/university education faculty combined with the opportunity to gain independent living skills in a campus community makes PSE programs an ideal way to meet the employment skill development needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Once a need for change has been identified, an action plan is developed, and focus groups or surveys are conducted to gather information as to where program developers need to focus their attention to address the current need (Thiede, 2020). Junevicius et al. (2021) highlights the importance of the program outcomes within the curriculum, and that programs must have the ability to take an individualized and/or student-centered approach in meeting

those outcomes. While collaborative practices are essential in program development it can also impede the implementation of the program (Norris & Martin, 2021). It is the effort put forth by stakeholders, and the shared belief for change that will lead to the achievement of desired outcomes (Junevicius et al., 2021). Thus, the process by which PSE programs are created and developed will be assessed in this study. However, as little is known about PSE program development, I now turn to what scholars have discovered about individuals with intellectual disabilities attending PSE programs (Hall et al., 2021).

Current Practices at the Postsecondary Level

There have been several studies conducted on the practices that are currently in place within PSE programs that are developed for students with intellectual disabilities to support employment development. Morningstar et al. (2018) found that using a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) at a PSE program was important to create college and career readiness. By using a multi-tiered system of support, students are involved, and engaged in planning for their career outcomes. This is significant in allowing students who are in PSE programs to have a plan to reach employment or career directed outcomes. This ensures that throughout their time in the PSE program, students are focused on student learning and program outcomes. This is important in that it will allow for the design of the programs to be refined and enhanced in meeting the individual student's employment outcomes. In the implementation of the MTSS at a PSE program, the following principles were provided: 1) there is schoolwide support for program students, staff and family members, 2) data are used in decision making and problem solving, 3) a multi-tiered system exists to improve student learning and behavior, and 4)

the practice of screening and progress monitoring is in place to ensure there is a continuum of evidence-based practices provided (Morningstar et al., 2018). This level of support is provided universally across the program with targeted and intensive interventions implemented for those who are identified with such needs. However, other programs use technology and specially designed materials to help support self-monitoring and independent work habits to support success (Love et al., 2019; Randall et al., 2019).

In many PSE programs, students audit courses that are on the college campus with 77% of PSE programs having inclusive academics (Papay & Grigal, 2019). When students are auditing courses, the expectation is that the students will participate in the class but will not receive credit towards a degree program. When professors of audited classes were asked about students from PSE programs, they felt ill-prepared to include the student from the PSE program (Lombardi et al., 2018). If professors were using the principles of universal design for instruction (UDI) they could feel more prepared in supporting students from PSE programs to be included in the class (Lombardi et al., 2018; Thompson et al., 2018). By providing instructors more support in developing instruction for those in PSE programs, it will enable the individual with a disability to show their potential in the class (Blaskowitz et al., 2020).

Akin and Huang (2019) found that there is a stigma associated with a visible disability from college students and professors. When stigmas exist, their ability is questioned which leads a student with a disability to not feel accepted and impacts their performance. PSE programs further develop inclusionary practices and can reduce the stigma on invisible and visible disabilities. The perception that exists based on one's

identified disability leads to limitations that are set for that individual. The perception that is made influences real-world interactions. It is critical to develop diverse and inclusionary education practices at the postsecondary level. Colleges and universities have emphasized service learning in recent years giving them greater authentic learning experiences (Corby et al., 2020; Hoover, 2016). Manikas et al. (2018) found that students who are involved in service learning at the postsecondary level build leadership skills and independence. They are working alongside their peers and contributing to the community. Thus, service learning as part of a PSE program where participants are working alongside traditional college students could serve as an inclusionary practice that also helps develop employments skills. Further, when individuals are using a hybrid model of instruction, they are taking classes that are degree seeking and classes designed for the PSE program to learn how to work at an independent level. This has led to individuals remaining at or choosing to attend additional PSE programs (Alqazlan et al., 2019; Ryan et al., 2019). When PSE program students are involved in learning within the community, it provides them with real-world experiences that could help build their resumes. At the same time, by working with PSE programs, the traditional college student is learning about acceptance and human diversity (Jones et al., 2016).

Another successful practice in supporting independence has been using a mentoring system within a PSE program. The program recruits college students who desire to work with individuals with disabilities as a career to be mentors in the PSE program (Griffin et al., 2016; Qian et al., 2018). This mentoring can support the individual during campus activities, or community involvement as well as in building

friendships. This further enables the PSE program to support students in learning like their typical, non-disabled peers.

Kelley and Buchanan (2017) reviewed several PSE programs to identify current practices that are implemented. The practices include: career interests/assessments, person-centered planning practices to determine support needs, advising and college course planning, setting up internships and paid work experiences, evaluation and observation of work performance, and connecting back to the community with video resumes. These are vital practices that help individuals with building employment skills and keep them engaged in obtaining their goals. This gives us some insight as to the data collected on the practices that have been implemented in a PSE program. However, this work still does not give us a clear understanding of how PSE programs have developed the employment aspects of their curriculum.

Desired Outcomes for Postsecondary Education Programs

The desired outcomes of a PSE program are to have students gain full-time or part-time employment once they have completed the program. Currently 61% of the PSE programs that include individuals with intellectual disabilities are 4-year programs (Chezan et al., 2018; Petcu et al., 2015). In these programs studied by Chezan et al. (2018) and Petcu et al. (2015), students have limited work experiences thus impacting their ability to be employed. PSE programs found that successful students in their programs require outreach, campus involvement and cultivating partnerships (Domin et al., 2020). Carter et al. (2017) found that there is a lack of resources for individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families to help them gain employment and that

obtaining employment increases the quality of life of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

It is essential for these programs to collect data on how PSE programs are meeting their desired outcomes. Chezan et al. (2018) found that PSE programs are using data collection to make decisions within the program. Those programs that are more than 2 years tend to have a better system for data collection compared to the 2-year programs. The authors examined the systems used to collect student progress data, program effectiveness data, the functioning of the PSE program based on the length of the program, how data are used in decision making, and lastly, the challenges PSE programs have with collecting data in relation to post-program employment.

Green et al. (2017) found that 90% of the participants in a PSE program at The Ohio State University were employed at least part-time after program completion. Therefore, PSE programs can implement effective practices to support the employment needs of those who are involved in the program. This shows that completion of a PSE program is highly beneficial in gaining employment, compared to only 5.5% of students who complete a traditional K-12 transition program who are employed (Disability Statistics, 2017). This further supports the findings of Prohn et al. (2018) who found that students who were in a PSE program were perceived to have gained more independence from participating in the program (see also Yuan et al., 2018). They can gain the needed skills to be included in an integrated community. In a study conducted by Ryan et al. (2019), 4% of PSE graduates maintained part-time employment and 96% chose to further their education by attending other PSE programs that went beyond 2 years. The work of

Ryan et al. (2019) showed the value individuals with intellectual disabilities found in PSE programs given most participants chose to enroll in a 4-year program after their experience in a 2-year program. The authors also found that those students who completed a 4-year PSE program were employed part-time working an average of 27 hours a week at an average hourly wage of $8.05. Whereas an individual who completed a 2-year program was working 22.38 hours a week at an average hourly wage of $8.90. Ryan et al. (2019) believes the difference in rate of pay was due to 2-year program participants having more work experience. Overall, the findings show that individuals with intellectual disabilities who attended a PSE program are twice as likely to be hired over individuals with intellectual disabilities who did not attend a PSE program (Sannicandro et al., 2018; Southward & Kyzar, 2017).

Possible Barriers to Achieving Postsecondary Education Outcomes

There are several possible barriers that could impact the long-term employment outcomes of those individuals who have participated in PSE programs. While in the program, individuals are to engage in an internship within the community. Internship placement could be difficult to obtain due to a lack of funding to encourage community partnerships or insensitive community members who decline to host interns. There is a great need for community members to be mentors for those who are part of a PSE program (Wessel, 2018). There is also a need for having internship placements that are willing to pay the individual with a disability while completing the internship experience. Wilson et al. (2017) found that those universities with greater financial support were able

to have paid work experiences and had higher levels of interest in continuing the internship placement if there was pay associated with the internship.

There are several barriers to the employment of individuals with disabilities after they have completed a PSE program that were left unanswered in the literature and need to be addressed. These questions include:

1) Do small local businesses have enough hours to provide program students with workplace opportunities?

2) Do the work hours support the schedule and adaptive behavior needs of the individuals?

3) What are the perceptions of employers of individuals with disabilities?

4) Would the individual be able to have transportation to and from the workplace (Berg et al., 2017; Scheef et al., 2018)?

5) Will the local placement be able to help the individual develop social interaction skills while working independently (Cullen et al., 2017; Gilson & Carter, 2016)?

6) Another area of concern for employers is how much they can depend on the individual to be present and on time when they might have issues with transportation (Price et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2017)?

An overall barrier for individuals to be able to participate in a PSE program is the financial cost of attending a program. This leads to PSE programs being more exclusive than inclusive contrary to the programs' original intent due to the financial cost of attendance. Carter (2017) and McMillan et al. (2017) found that many of these programs

are independently funded from those families who have students in the program. There is

limited financial aid or grants that can cover the cost of a program. The grants may only

cover a certain percentage of the program, and leaves families paying out of pocket for

the individual to complete the program (McMillan et al., 2017). If these programs are not

degree seeking or certificate bearing, the individual cannot apply for government-

supported loans that other college students can acquire. The Achieving a Better Life

Experience Act (ABLE, 2014) allows for families to create saving accounts to help

support the financial needs of their adult child with a disability (Baig, 2021; Caniglia &

Michali, 2018). Families need to be aware of how to enroll in their state's Achieving a

Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act investment program and put funds aside for the PSE

program. Few states offer tuition assistance for PSE programs, whereas families can

apply for assistance with vocational rehabilitation (McMillan et al., 2017).

This study's exploration of the development of PSE programs is needed to gain a

greater understanding of how PSE programs are developed so that colleges and

universities have the knowledge required to develop more PSE programs for students

with intellectual disabilities in the future. When individuals are employed, their

perspective of their quality of life is higher than those who are not employed (Miller et

al., 2018). The literature provides limited examples of practices directly related to

employment outcomes after completing a PSE program (Kelley & Buchanan, 2017). We

need to obtain a greater understanding of how PSE programs are developed to prepare

their participants for employment. The studies cited demonstrate the benefits of PSE

program participation but offer little in terms of the curriculum employed to achieve these benefits.

Research on PSE programs does offer insight on current practices that tend to be implemented which have positive social and academic outcomes, such as implementing a mentoring program (Griffin et al., 2016). The literature addresses the need to have a paid internship to help increase the motivation for individuals to engage in the placement and take ownership of their responsibilities as if they were employed (Green et al., 2017). While Scheef et al. (2018) found that paid internships have fostered high post-PSE programing employment outcomes, these paid internships may not be widely available. PSE programs still need to have effective practices in preparing individuals for employment, whether or not the community can partner with the PSE program to have paid internships. While there may be limited resources to ensure paid internships for PSE program participants, these programs must have another method to motivate participants to actively engage in an unpaid internship.

Interviews with PSE program participants and their families by Miller et al. (2018) have helped gain an understanding of the variety of practices that have been implemented by PSE programs. However, their work does not clearly indicate what goes into developing the curriculum for employment awareness and preparedness nor the process for creating a PSE program (Brady, 2021). The interview data obtained from this dissertation fills this gap in practice by generating an understanding of how PSE programs are designed and developed, as much of the current literature reviewed is

focused on the outcomes of these programs. This information while valuable, is limited in how it can help new PSE programs be developed.

Summary and Conclusions

Program development in higher education begins with the identification of a need for change followed by data collection from relevant stakeholders, and the creation of program outcomes aligned to the needed change. Existing research demonstrates a clear need for additional PSE programs. Research has found that parents want their adult child to gain independence by holding a job, increasing independent living skills, and being socially engaged. Overall, parents felt that having their adult child involved in a PSE program led to an increase in their happiness. PSE programs can guide participants in becoming an active member of an inclusive community. The literature supports the necessity of PSE programs preparing participants for employment and the success they can achieve in this endeavor. However, while studies have focused on how PSE programs operate and their outcomes, the literature is lacking in creating an understanding of how these programs are developed and evaluated. Further, without enough programs available to meet the needs of this community, many will remain unemployed. This dissertation explores the development of these programs and provides valuable information to enable more colleges and universities to create these needed PSE programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities. In now moving to chapter 3, I discuss the methods employed for this exploration of the development of PSE programs.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate how PSE programs are developed to provide employment skills training and education to individuals with intellectual disabilities. The participants were directors or faculty from PSE programs in one northeastern state. I used qualitative data collected from interviews to gain a deeper understanding of how leaders at colleges and universities develop PSE programs to provide students with the educational experiences needed to improve employment skills. The knowledge gained from this study may be beneficial for college and university leaders seeking to create new PSE programs as they will be able to draw upon the experiences of the participants of this study in developing their own programs. In this chapter, I discuss the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, and the methodology used in this study.

Research Design and Rationale

Individuals with disabilities typically attend a public school from kindergarten through the age of 21; transition services start at the age of 16 based on guidelines set by IDEA (2004). School officials are required to address and plan for students' life after graduation from public school in students' IEPs. Nondisabled individuals can continue their education at a technical school or a postsecondary educational institution to give them more options for a career path. This pathway may be less accessible for individuals with intellectual disabilities who desire to continue their education after graduation.

Postsecondary education programs should be accessible for those who have the desire and qualify for acceptance into a program (Hall et al., 2021). However, with a lack

of understanding of how these PSE programs are developed, programmers had little guidance in developing PSE programs to meet the educational and employment skill development needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities (Hall et al., 2021). I conducted a qualitative study. A qualitative approach involves systematic and contextual processes to interpret humans' viewpoints and make meaning from their experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Using this approach provided a way to study how PSE program faculty and staff focused on education and employment skill development for individuals with intellectual disabilities in creating programs. The detailed descriptions I sought in understanding the development of these programs along with the small sample size (only 18 programs existed in the target state at the time of the study) did not support the use of quantitative methods for this research.

Although there were other qualitative methods that could have been employed, interviews best allowed for an understanding of the development of PSE programs and their projected plans for the future (see Thomas et al., 2009). I conducted a basic qualitative study featuring analysis of interview data. I considered phenomenology, case study, ethnography, and grounded theory as other possible approaches. In a phenomenological study, the researcher examines the lived experiences of participants to find common meaning (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The current study involved analyzing one professional undertaking, and not an ongoing lived experience. Also, in a phenomenological study, the concepts are looked at in an abstract manner (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It was important that I clearly explain to the reader the experiences and perceptions of those involved in developing PSE programs. Further, phenomenological

researchers tend to look for common practices across participant experiences. However, not all PSE programs are designed following the same approach to implementation. Some of the PSE programs had limitations that others did not have given the guidelines set by the university that houses the program or a program's level of access to community partners. Due to differences in each program, the data might not lead to a single common theme (Vlachou et al., 2015). Therefore, a phenomenological study did not align to the goals of this work.

Another design that was considered was a case study, which would have entailed an in-depth examination of a few PSE programs. Conducting a case study would have provided an in-depth understanding of the story and the development of a small number of PSE programs. However, this might have limited the generalization of the data (Rumrill et al., 2011). Use of the basic qualitative design allowed for multiple interviews of participants leading to a wider variety of responses (Rumrill et al., 2011).

Further, an ethnographic study was not aligned to the goals of the research as I was not examining the culture that exists within PSE programs, but rather how they were developed. Concurrently, as any PSE program is going to have unique constraints in their operation depending on the policies of their college or university, identifying one unifying theory of PSE program creation is impractical making grounded theory an inappropriate choice for the methodology employed in this study.

To gain an understanding of how PSE programs are developed, I conducted interviews with program directors and faculty who are familiar with the creation and operation of PSEs, which is consistent with the basic qualitative design (LeGros et al.,

2015). I sought insight on employment skill development based on the experiences of program creators, leaders, or faculty. This study may yield a greater understanding of the most effective ways to develop PSE programs. The findings of this study may help the leaders of other postsecondary institutions to create their own programs to support employment skill development. The following research question underpinned this study: What are the perceptions of PSE faculty and program directors on how to develop a PSE program to support the education and employment needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities?

Role of the Researcher

As an advocate for postsecondary education for all individuals, it was vital that I develop relationships with postsecondary institution professionals for this study. Furthermore, being an instructor at the postsecondary level, I try to create an opportunity for all students to participate and to reach their individual goals. My experience as a special education teacher and as one who has worked at the postsecondary level to prepare preservice educators for their future careers has shown me that the need exists for employment skill development for students with intellectual disabilities. I have used a variety of fieldwork and real-world learning activities to instruct preservice educators and have supervised their student teaching experiences to help prepare them to one-day teach and manage their own classrooms. For the past 10 years, I have worked as an adjunct faculty member at a postsecondary university that hosts a PSE program. I am a professional acquaintance of the director of the PSE program and have no direct relationship with the program. I have witnessed the positive social experiences of the

students attending the PSE program, which led me to wonder how these programs developed.

To address this question, I conducted semistructured interviews with individuals knowledgeable about the development of PSE programs. It was essential to obtain an in-depth understanding of how the program was developed and how programmers overcame barriers. Biases can be a concern in qualitative research. The interviews were semistructured to allow participants to share the information they deemed important, and the questions posed were designed to not elicit particular responses. I needed to be aware of the potential biases that I could bring to my research. I strictly used the information each participant provided. I took notes and cross-referenced those notes with the audio recording of the interviews. This helped ensure that I did not misinterpret what a participant stated. If I became unsure of a participant's response, I asked for clarification to avoid any type of misinterpretation.

Frequent collaboration with my dissertation committee allowed me to obtain insight from other researchers in developing the interview questions, transcribing the interviews, and interpreting the data. Throughout this process, it was important to maintain the integrity of the data collection and analysis so as to support the reliability of the findings.

Educational leaders who have developed and/or instructed in PSE programs served as the participants for the qualitative study. It was important to accurately convey the results of this research to honor their commitment to the practices that they established in postsecondary education for individuals with intellectual disabilities. These

professionals may have had a person close to them in their personal lives who has a disability, or they might even have a disability. It was important to consider that they may have some vulnerabilities and to be sensitive to their needs (Carey & Griffiths, 2017).

Methodology

To gather data for this study, I employed semistructured interview questions. By collecting information shared through interviews, I gathered participants' descriptions and perceptions of the practices they had used to develop a PSE program at their institution. I was able to focus on how they educated students in employment skill development. The main reason for using semistructured interviews was to find the common experiences and practices of these PSE programmers. Semistructured interviews allowed for a personal connection with participants. The interviews also yielded a breadth of information that could inform and influence the development of future PSE programs. During the interviews, the participants answered questions orally. If an interpreter was needed, one would have been provided, but this was never necessary.

The participants for the study included a director or faculty of a PSE program that is housed on a university or college campus. The characteristics of the program such as program duration did differ. Within the narrative inquiry, it allowed me to understand if the length of the program could impact how employment curriculum is created and presented to those who attend the program. While a search of qualitative methodologies provided alternatives to a narrative inquiry in learning more about instruction for employment in a PSE program, using a narrative inquiry enabled me to capture individual

perspectives on the decisions made throughout the development and implementation process and where they see the program in the future.

Participant Selection

I used purposeful sampling strategy for this study. This study focused on university or college housed PSE programs, in one northeastern state. Using the contact list found on ThinkCollege.Net (2021), I contacted 10 directors or lead faculty of PSE programs within the state. The first contact was an email, found in Appendix A, to the potential participants explaining the study and requesting their participation for an interview. When a participant responded to the email stating their willingness to be interviewed, they were provided a consent form to review and sign. If I was unable to get in contact with a potential participant via email, I followed up with a phone call.

Instrumentation

The instrument employed in this study was a set of interview questions, which can be found in Appendix B. The questions were designed to get an in-depth understanding of how PSE programs were developed, how they provide employment skills training, how they establish internships for students in the program, and the identification of barriers they could have encountered in establishing the PSE program at a university or college. These interview questions along with the reflective analysis of the responses directly answer the research question.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The desired participants are those directors or educational leaders who were part of the PSE program as it was developed and/or who are actively involved with program

decision making. I emailed each potential participant to describe the study and ask for their participation. A copy of the consent to participate was attached. Participants were asked to reply to the email with "I consent" if they agreed to participate. I would have provided a hard copy of the consent form if the participant requested one, but no one made such a request. Hard copies of the consent form would have been mailed through the U.S. Postal Service.

Email communication was the first option in scheduling the interview. If a desired participant did not respond by email in a week's time, phone call communication was used to schedule the interview. I tried to be as flexible as possible to allow for convenient times for the participant to be interviewed. Once an established time was agreed to, I conducted individual semistructured interviews with the participants using Zoom. An invitation to the individual Zoom meeting was emailed to each participant. Using Zoom allowed me to reach a broader scope of participants from various locations in this northeastern state. By using a video meeting, I was able to observe non-verbal responses and know when to use follow-up or more probing questions. Also, a video meeting allowed me to build a rapport with the participants that might not have been possible with a phone interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

It is strongly suggested that a valid study should have 10-15 participants, thus the 10 participants in this study can provide quality information to answer the research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In conducting the interviews, I followed an interview protocol for all participants. To begin each interview, I gave a

warm greeting and thanked the participant in advance for their participation. I explained

the purpose of the study and the expectations as outlined in the interview protocol. The

protocol consisted of the following procedures:

1. Introduce participant and researcher.

2. Discuss the purpose of the study.

3. Review confidentiality.

4. Review of recording protocol, including consent to record and ability to withdraw from participation.

5. Answer participant questions.

6. Ask interview questions in order.

7. Engage in open discussion with participant.

8. Thank the participant for their time.

I stated that all the responses are confidential and asked the participant if the

interview could be audio recorded. Additionally, I reminded the participant that the

interview was voluntary and at any time they could choose not to respond to a question or

end the interview. All interviews were audio recorded using the record feature on Zoom

to ensure my notes were accurate. Although no one did, if a participant had declined to

have the interview recorded, my notes would have served as the primary source of data.

Using the recording feature in Zoom, audio recorded sessions were transcribed, and

cross-referenced with my notes from the interview and the audio file. The recording of

the interview ensured credibility as it is a reliable method of data collection. As needed

throughout the interview, I asked for the participant to expand upon or clarify their responses.

Participants had the right to request to the completed findings of the study (Burkholder et al., 2016). A debriefing of this study was available for participants with a disclosure to have access to the findings. For any participants who requested the findings, the debriefing was included in an exit email that also included a thank you note for their participation. For those participants who did not request the findings, the exit email only included a thank you note for their willingness to participate in the study.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis is an important part of the study process, where the researcher collects and organizes data to draw conclusions that lead to the findings of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The research question is developed to guide data collection and the organization of the interview questions. The interview questions should connect the conceptual framework and data collection to align with the research question. The interview questions for this study focused on PSE program development, staffing, and the implementation of educational practices for employment skill development.

In this qualitative study, it was important that I as the researcher avoided any misrepresentation of the data collected. After the interviews, I used the interview transcriptions and notes-taking protocol checklists to further check for accuracy. To avoid misrepresentation of the data, member checking could be used help to support the validity of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A summary of the findings was provided to the participants, if requested (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

When analyzing the data in this qualitative study, there was a large quantity of information that needed to be organized. The primary source of data were the transcripts from the audio recorded interviews, and the interview notes written by the researcher. I became familiar with and reflected on the interview data collected. I used open and axial coding approaches followed by thematic analysis to analyze the interview data. Typically, qualitative data analysis begins with an open coding process to categorize the data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Coding is a way to take detailed information and reduce it to small units to gain meaning from the data. Key words or phrases were identified during open coding that allowed the interview data to be organized (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The interview data were organized first into broad categories and then where appropriate, subcategories were identified. Once open coding was complete, axial coding was implemented to identify connections between the categories, and subcategories identified in the open coding process. The results of the axial coding process helped support organizing the data into themes (Saldaña, 2016). By identifying these emerging themes, the researcher can find interesting patterns in the data to help develop an answer to the research question. This thematic analysis was conducted without the use of computer software. Once emerging themes were identified, I assessed how the themes related to each other (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Overall, the use of thematic analysis allowed for the identification of patterns in the data that were connected to and helped answer the research question posed in the study (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

Trustworthiness

It is important to develop a study that is trustworthy in qualitative research. The implementation of the research design and the findings need to be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To maintain trustworthiness throughout the study process, I worked with my doctoral committee members to ensure the study maintained fidelity to the research design in order to provide reliable and valid results. Data were collected in a transparent manner that supported the credibility of the research study (Babbie, 2017).

Credibility

The findings of my qualitative study should be deemed credible because the participants were recorded, and their responses were transcribed to analyze the interview data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Therefore, the information gathered by this method was accurate (Creswell, 2018). Further, the use of selective sampling ensured the participants were credible sources that could provide valid information for this study (Babbie, 2017). Member checking can also be used to increase internal validity. Member checks ensure credibility because it allows for participants to check that that the main findings are in concert with participant responses. Participants had the option to be sent the information from their interview to review and reply to the findings. Participant agreement with the emergent themes could help support the credibility of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Transferability

Qualitative methods are not designed for external validity. However, transferability, similar in nature to external validity, can be established with qualitative

methods that can be applied to other situations or people (Burkholder et al., 2016). To increase transferability, it was important to provide a detailed explanation of the findings and the setting of the study. Providing a detailed description of how the interviews were conducted along with a detailed description of the findings of this study help demonstrate that the results of the study are transferable when it comes to PSE program design.

Dependability

Dependability in a qualitative study is important so that one researcher's method should be able to be implemented by another researcher. One way to ensure dependability in a study is to have accurate records and a clearly defined data collection process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I took notes on the decisions I made on participant sampling, ethical concerns, and other questions that arose during the study. I kept a reflexive journal where I documented my daily research activities and interactions with participants. My notes were detailed in documenting each step of the process and communication with each participant. Using an audit trail supported the decisions made in coding and identifying themes during the data organization process.

Confirmability

Confirmability is also important in qualitative research to validate the findings. To achieve confirmability, the interpretation of the results needs to be free of personal biases or agendas (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Reflective journaling enabled me to record my experiences and my reflective practices. Through documentation of my experiences, I was able to reflect on my own influences, perceptions, and background knowledge. Further, these accurate notes of the process used to conduct the study ensure credibility

by implementing consistency throughout the study (Creswell, 2018). Journaling also allowed me to document decisions, justifications, values, and beliefs that could have impacted the direction of the study in order to prevent personal biases from influencing the results.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical issues could arise as a researcher is conducting their study and those issues need to be addressed both before and while the study is being conducted (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Therefore, I followed Walden University's policy and completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research Web-based training course, Protecting Human Research Participants. I was aware of the guidelines needed to manage ethical concerns with participation, refusal to participate and early withdrawal from a study. The Walden University Institutional Review Board requirements and process were followed to ensure ethical procedures were maintained. There were limited to no conflicts of interest in this study. As an adjunct professor at a university that houses a PSE program, I have a professional colleague that is a director of a PSE program, but I do not work for or with the PSE program.

It was critical to obtain informed consent from my participants in the study, and clearly identify that they were volunteering to participate in the study (Carey & Griffiths, 2017). The recorded interviews and transcriptions are stored on a password protected flash drive to keep data and participant information confidential. All participants' identities will remain confidential. The data will be destroyed 5 years after the

completion of the study. Electronic data will be removed and erased securely from the computer after 5 years. Lastly, any hard copies of data will be shredded.

Summary

This study used a basic qualitative method to explain how postsecondary education programs have been developed to provide employment skills and career readiness training for program students. By gaining a better understanding of PSE program development from the experiences of the participants, the findings are now available to guide others in the creation of new PSE programs.

Chapter 3 presented my research design, the participants, and my role as a researcher in my qualitative study. To analyze the interview data, I engaged in open and then axial coding. The axial coding was then used to engage in a thematic analysis of how PSE programs develop employment skills. The desired number of participants for this study was to have one PSE faculty member or program director from 75% of PSE programs in this northeastern state. However, I was only able to interview individuals representing 10 of the 18 programs. I followed the ethical guidelines of human subjects research in gathering and analyzing the data to produce a trustworthy study. In Chapter 4, I discuss the results from my semistructured interviews of PSE program leaders according to the research design described in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate how a PSE program for individuals with intellectual disabilities is developed. University faculty and staff may be able to use the results from this study to help develop a program at their location. Furthermore, the results can potentially help leaders of existing programs to develop a strategic plan for future growth. The research question was: What are the perceptions of PSE faculty and program directors on how to develop a PSE program to support the education and employment needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities?

In developing the research question, I drew from Dewey's (1938) work on experiential learning theory. Other scholars share Dewey's emphasis on experiential learning, such as Laverick et. al (2020), who found that the act of doing is a more concrete way of learning over reading or hearing about content. Experiential learning theory was appropriate for this qualitative study because the foundation of a PSE program is to give individuals with disabilities a similar college experience to that of their nondisabled peers if they choose to continue their education (Laverick et al, 2020). This framework supports the research question and the concept of a PSE program because it concerns the authentic experience an individual with or without disabilities could have by attending a postsecondary institution. Experimental learning theory emphasizes how an individual can learn through experiences.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the data collection and analysis procedures used in the study. I discuss the participants and the settings, along with the method by which the data were generated, collected, and recorded. Additionally, I explain how open coding, axial

coding, and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data. Finally, I address the

research question with data to support the findings and include evidence of

trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a summary of key points.

Setting

On December 13th, 2021, Walden University's Institutional Review Board

approved my application to conduct the study within one northeastern state in the United

States (approval no. 12-13-21-0668031). The following week, I began sending out

invitations by email to PSE program directors to participate in my study.

I used the information that was listed on Think College for the state to identify the

participants. Think College (2021) is an online resource for parents and individuals with

disabilities who are looking to further their education; the site includes a database of PSE

programs throughout the United States. In the email invitation, I explained the purpose of

my study. I provided a few example questions (see Appendix A) and the consent form to

all those who I thought might be eligible for the study. Interviews were scheduled based

on when the participant was able to meet on Zoom. Participants for this study were all

directors of PSE programs; however, the length of the program, staffing size, and the

enrollment numbers differed among the programs. Table 1 provides a brief overview of

each participant's program including what types of courses are offered, whether funding

was obtained from Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual

Disabilities (TPSID), and whether the program is a Comprehensive Transition Program

(CTP).

Table 1

Overview of Participants' Programs

Participant	Program length (years)	No. of students	No. of staff	No. of directors	Course type	TPSID	CTP	Housing
1	2	10	0	1	S, A	No	Yes	On campus
2	4	5	1	1	A	Yes	No	On campus
3	2	4	0	1	A	No	Yes	Commute
4	2	19	2	1	A, C	No	Yes	On campus
5	3	22	3	1	A	No	No	Commute
6	2 or 4	11	1	1	A, C	Yes	Yes	On campus
7	2	12	3	1	A	No	No	Commute
8	4	3	0	2	A	Yes	No	Commute
9	2	22	2	1	S, A, C	No	Yes	Commute
10	3	30	4	1	S, A	No	No	Off campus apartments, commute

Note. The S course curriculum includes courses specifically designed for postsecondary education (PSE) program students. The A curriculum includes PSE programming in which students audit traditional college courses. In the C curriculum, PSE program students enroll in traditional college courses for credit. TPSID = Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities; CTP = Comprehensive Transition Program.

Data Collection

Three weeks after sending the initial invitation to prospective participants, I followed up with a second email invitation and received my first consent to participate. After the second email invitation, I called each program director and left a message asking them to consider participating; I included information on how to reach me if they had questions. It took 3 months from the initial invitation to schedule and complete 10 interviews. No participant changed their mind about participating in the study.

I conducted the semistructured interviews through videoconferencing. I used email and telephone communication with participants to schedule interviews. When a

date and time was arranged, the participant was emailed an electronic link to join a Zoom videoconference call. Each interview had a specific meeting link that was secured for the participant. No other individual was able to access the videoconference unless admitted by me. Each interview was conducted in a one-to-one setting, and the participant chose the location that fit their needs. I was in a quiet workspace behind closed doors. The participant and I were both responsible for choosing an ideal setting with limited distractions. The duration of the interviews was 45 to 60 minutes. With permission, I recorded the interview using the recording feature of the web-based conferencing software. Interviews were saved to my personal, password-protected computer. The conferencing application transcribed the interviews, which were saved with password protection.

Throughout the interviews, I took handwritten notes that I later typed and used to cross-reference with the electronic transcription. The handwritten notes were saved and locked in a filing cabinet to be shredded at a later date. Using the electronic recording transcription and notes improved accuracy and helped to prevent my own biases from being reflected in the data collection process. Using the audio recording allowed me to collect the participants' responses and to listen and engage in a discussion when appropriate without missing information. I believe that this allowed for the participant to feel they were being heard and that the information they were sharing was significant.

Data Analysis

For this study, I used the qualitative data analysis techniques of open and axial coding and thematic analysis to analyze the data. The sample had only 10 participants so

there was no need to use any program other than a Microsoft Word document for data analysis. When analyzing the qualitative data, I followed the steps described by Creswell (2018):

- Step 1. I transcribed each interview based on the digital recording and note-taking. Recordings and notes were reviewed to ensure that information was not missed through the transcription process.

- Step 2. I reviewed the data to be familiar with the responses the participant provided and to make an overall assessment of the information. Notes on the overall impressions of the data were helpful to develop ideas on how to present the data. To document the impressions, I used the Comments tool in Microsoft Word. Each response was sorted by interview question into a table.

- Step 3. Using Microsoft Word, I segmented the data collection by broad categories using open coding. Each code was assigned a color and given a category title. After developing broad categories, I separated the coded data in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The color-coded data were placed in the most appropriate column. Subcategories were developed to give more detailed information under the broad category.

- Step 4. The next step in analyzing the data was to use axial coding related to the categories that were developed during the open coding process. Using axial coding allowed me to confirm and explore concepts. When appropriate, similar categories were combined to help with narrowing down the data.

- Step 5. The last step was to identify emerging themes from the data. This

  process involved consolidating the data into the final results. I was able to use

  each code to develop the themes. This allowed me to accurately organize the

  data to identify the findings.

Discrepant Cases

It is essential that all discrepant information is shared to support the credibility of

the data (Creswell, 2012). Regardless of the type of PSE program, all participant

perspectives were used in this study leaving no discrepant data.

Results

By using thematic coding analysis, I identified three main themes in the study. Six

themes emerged to answer the research question based on the axial coding analysis (see

Table 2). The research question was, what are the perceptions of PSE faculty and

program directors on how to develop a PSE program to support the education and

employment needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities?

Table 2

Axial Codes Identified From Participant Interviews

Theme	Participant									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Principle of normalization	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Person-centered planning	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Mentors	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Courses	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Social setting	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Internships	x	--	x	x	--	x	--	x	--	x
Program development	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Auditing courses	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Faculty support	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Collaborative practices	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Ongoing skill development	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Ongoing housing development	x	x	--	x	--	x	--	--	--	x

Before presenting the themes identified from the interview data, it should be noted that while all 10 participants represented PSE programs, the data revealed significant diversity in program history and the population served. At the time of the interviews, four of the 10 PSE programs had more than one cohort of students complete the program. However, participant 2 was preparing to welcome the first cohort to their PSE program and stated: "I was hesitant to share our program's story because we have yet to have a cohort on campus, but I have the ability to share firsthand how I have advocated to bring this needed program to my university."

Two of the 10 programs were working with students who were 18-21 years of age, and while these students had not transitioned out of their secondary education, they still added value to this study. Participant 5 stated:

> Our program is not the traditional PSE program, like you have heard about from others who have participated in your study, ours solely is for students who are still working towards completing their high school transition plans but here on our campus. We do not meet the criteria for the CTP, because of the amount of the percentage of inclusion time. We find our program is creating meaningful experiences that meet the needs of our students. This is worth sharing so others may be open to developing a program like ours or like the other programs you

heard about. Bottomline, it doesn't matter how the program is classified, what matters is there is a program there for a student who wants to keep learning. Participant 7 made a very telling statement based on their knowledge of other PSE programs and comparing them to the one they direct. They said: "Our program may be different than others out there. We all have a slightly different approach. We all still foster independence as they transition from high school into adulthood. I look at measuring their success based on how they have become contributing members of society in our community." Therefore, PSE programs share the three themes discussed hereafter and similar goals regardless of when they were created or if they only serve a particular niche of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Theme 1: Embrace of Normalization and Person-Centered Planning as a Key Part of the Mission

Francisco et al. (2020) and Simpson (2018) viewed normalization as the everyday inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the real world. Individuals with disabilities should be experiencing life as their non-disabled peers would experience it. Francisco et al. (2020) states that this movement started in the 1960s in Sweden based on Bengt Nirje's research comparing individuals who lived at home to those in an institution. This study influenced educational practices in the United States to integrate special education students into the regular education classroom and in the community to promote independence. This practice continues to evolve into the postsecondary level by way of postsecondary education programs for those with intellectual disabilities.

One hundred percent of the participants stated that PSE participants spend most of their day being included in college courses, interacting with the credit-enrolled college students, participating in clubs and organizations on campus, working within the community and using resources available to others in the community. Students who are enrolled in the PSE program have access to the university library, computer labs, recreational facilities, etc. Participant 6 stated:

Through our conversations we were clearly giving them (administration) a vision of what we wanted to see for our students on campus. There was no need for an in-depth discussion or debate, our students were able to live, engage and participate on campus as other enrolled students.

When asked how they support the needs of the university faculty in supporting the PSE program students in their courses, four of the programs stated that they worked closely with the diversity, equity and inclusion action plans on their campus. Participant 4 explained:

Our program is a little more well established so we are starting to look beyond the classroom providing support; we continue to develop better ways of working with faculty, but we are also looking at how to support our college coaches to build a more inclusive environment. There has been a significant push on college campuses for diversity, equity, and inclusion right now. Our program falls into those categories; this has really helped support the growth of our program.

They provide on-going presentations and workshops to explain how to use universal design for learning (UDL) at the postsecondary level. They work closely with faculty

members in developing and supporting the accommodations and modifications to courses. Participant 3 stated:

> In the first year we spent a lot of time with our faculty and our students talking and working out how to use existing accommodations from Disabilities Services. We as PSE faculty tended to do more of that until our students learned how to use their voice. They start to develop more of that in year 2.

> When speaking about the mission of the PSE program, several of the program directors discussed the connection between the mission of the PSE Program and the mission of the university. Participant 10 stated:

> The mission of the program is to provide support so that everyone has the right to access higher education to enhance their learning and realize their personal potential. Our participants with disabilities have a high-quality learning experience within the university setting to foster learning, develop friendships, build self-confidence, advocacy skills and work towards meeting their goals to work and live in an inclusive community.

Participant 4 also stated:

> The mission of our comprehensive transition program is to provide a fully inclusive college experience for individuals who meet the qualifications with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Our program focuses on the four major pillars: academics, vocational, physical activity and social.

Participant 1 stated the program started based on the foundation of the values of the university:

The mission of our program is to merge the following four elements: academic knowledge, social and psychological development, independent living skills, and career and vocational skills. This aligns with the universities' values to support a residential environment that provides students a meaningful and unique college experience. The program allows students to explore and realize both their learning potential and maximize their personal growth, while preparing students for future, meaningful employment.

The data collected led to an understanding of what the program can and cannot offer participants, with each program application requiring a great deal of documentation to be submitted, as well as for the applicant to visit the campus multiple times for various lengths of time. This process allowed for the admissions team to get to know the applicant and to understand how they can receive meaningful outcomes from the program. All programs have a maximum number of students they will accept each year. Five of the programs are in "pilot years" where their numbers for admission are lower because they have yet to have students complete/graduate from the PSE program. Participant 9 expressed that they focus a great deal on person centered planning, where they look at the interests of the students to find courses within the current catalog that would meet the requirements for PSE program completion, but also satisfy the interests or goals of the student.

It is hard to say what the duration of our program is, students are here as long as they need to be here for their program. If they choose one track, they could be

here for 2 years, compared to another it could take 3-4 years. It really is based

off what the student chooses.

Participants 1, 9 and 10 reported that their programs have developed courses

specifically for the PSE program to meet the needs of the accepted students that will

help them be more successful in the courses they audit and, in their internships, or work

placements. Participant 10 stated: "The classes that are designed for the PSE program

are to help orientate the students as to what their needs could be to better acclimate to

auditing classes and what their needs could be with their internship." Whereas the other

participants stated their students solely audit classes on the college campus. When PSE

program leaders see that there is an ongoing area that needs more support, they use

conferencing or advisement time to work with the student or develop a workshop to

support skill development. Participant 5 said:

> We will have weekly meetings where we would cover health and safety skill
>
> development in cooking and other independent living skills since the students
>
> are commuters and live at home. If we see a trend in an area of need, we would
>
> cover that topic or have a speaker come in to help address the skill.

Theme 2: Reliance on the College Student Body to Provide Peer Mentorship for

Program Participants

Each participant stated that their PSE programs have members of the campus

student body serve as mentors for those students in the PSE program. Mentors are used in

a variety of campus settings based on the needs of the PSE students. In discussing the

importance of mentors, Participant 3 stated: "Our peer mentors serve as academic

coaches and are undergraduate students. They can provide support in or out of class as the student needs. They can also help them access and use the campus resources." Mentors are trained by the staff of the PSE program, and this allows for students in various degree seeking programs to be a mentor. Mentors attend audited classes with the PSE students where they can support the student with note-taking, completing assignments and to assist with implementing accommodations the PSE students may need. The PSE staff arrange the modifications and accommodations with the faculty member before the start of the term. This then allows the mentors to support the PSE students in the natural college and local communities.

Some PSE programs have mentors that provide one to one support for the students outside of the class; these could be called academic or educational mentors. They are there to help the student with course work outside of the classroom. They help the PSE students with organizing and maintaining their course requirements. These mentors can also help support the PSE program students in their internship. There could also be other mentors that live in the residential setting to assist in skill development for independent living. Participant 6 stated:

> We find that our students might not need academic support like other programs,
> but we have mentors if needed. What we do is we find mentors whose interests,
> and personalities mesh with each other. So, if we have a student who is at a
> specific internship, we would find a mentor who has that same area of interest or
> connection. One student could have 4-7 different mentors working with them.

Each participant in the study stated the mentors are there as needed supports for the PSE program students. As Participant 5 said:

> The support the peer mentors give is really based on the need of the student in the classroom or at the internship, we don't always know where to start with the student. However, we know that this is the start of the least restrictive support.

Students in the PSE program are participating in clubs and organizations on campus, attending events on campus and using the campus resources. Mentors can be with the PSE program students to provide support or even be there to guide social interactions. PSE program students are partaking in all aspects of the college experience. Mentors are there to support and build the confidence of the PSE student to actively engage within the college and local community. PSE program faculty try to have mentors who are currently enrolled in the course or one who has taken the course to provide more of a natural peer connection that would develop at the college level. Participant 8 said:

> We have several of our doctoral students interested in the principles of UDL. They are working closely with the faculty of PSE students enrolled in audit courses and our students to provide support for implementing UDL. This is naturally supporting our students, because it enhances their teaching practices and builds more learning opportunities.

The PSE study participants found that students can use what they are learning during the audited courses with their peers and mentors and are able to apply that within their daily lives. They find that the PSE students are developing social skills

within the classroom and are utilizing those social skills during campus events and in their internships. Participant 7 shared:

> The courses the students audit has become the lifeline to the level of engagement our students have. All students get to know each other in the classroom and then when they see each other in the dining area you see the social interaction naturally happen.

The skills they most commonly gave as examples are: (a) an increased ability to follow directions and a routine, (b) improved social greetings, (c) communication skills and (d) awareness of others.

Theme 3: Commitment to Ongoing Program Development to Provide High-Quality Postsecondary Experiences for Students

All programs started from a request from the parents within the local community to address the need for further education or programming for their child with a disability past the age of 18. Some of the programs started out with adults with disabilities on campus weekly or monthly for social engagement activities. There was a desire from the community to have more. The local community members reached out to the appropriate campus faculty member to start the conversation. Participant 6 stated:

> Our university had a program for individuals on the Autism Spectrum, but their program goals were not aligned with meeting the needs of members of the ID community. This need allowed me to start the discussion with the Dean's Council and the Executive Council of the university. Within our discussions, we found

there was an alignment with the mission and vision of the university. Following

that conversation, I developed an outline for our PSE program.

Each participant stressed an ongoing commitment to program development in the

planning phase, as well as a plan for future growth and development through the pilot and

implementation phases of the PSE program. Each participant addressed the need for

communication with the university administration, university council and faculty on

campus. While each of the participants described very different experiences, they stressed

that in all meetings they focused on how the program can be integrated into the college

community. Each participant spoke about having these meetings and addressing

questions and concerns. Those starting the PSE program used these meetings to hear and

understand other perspectives. They would adjust implementation plans to better meet the

needs of the community and to improve the PSE experience for the students. Participant 4

stated:

> When there has been a change in the administrative cabinet at our institution, I
>
> have made it a priority to have face to face time with the newly appointed person.
>
> I want them to have an understanding of what our program brings to our
>
> community. I try to present a clear narrative of what our program is, our goals,
>
> what we bring to the community, what we add to the community and to invite the
>
> new community member to be a stakeholder. I want the new member of our
>
> community to know who to look for if they have questions.

Participant 2 explained how they looked at the interdisciplinary studies program at their university and thought about what the needs of an individual with intellectual disabilities would be. They stated:

When I started to plan to introduce this program to the campus, I looked at how would we introduce a new program for the general university population. I started to complete and develop all the requirements that any other curriculum program would go through. When I had all the forms, and documents completed everything was reviewed through the college curriculum committee. I then developed a tracking sheet that had all the descriptions of the courses and described the program. I listed all the student learning outcomes and developed surveys. When meeting with the committee, I would answer any and all questions they had about the program. It then went to administration for approval and onto the state.

Participant 2 further explained how they developed a program tracking sheet that would work for a 4-year program but was flexible enough for the student to make choices about what they wanted from the program. Using the interdisciplinary program guidelines allowed for the most flexibility for students to earn credits from courses and internships to complete their PSE program requirements. Participant 2 stated: "It was important for students to mirror a schedule as a full-time student but to have the work experiences embedded in their schedules." When initiating requests to the university for adjustments to be made to support a student with intellectual disabilities, the programs followed a

similar process as to what the university did to accommodate traditional students to help ensure that the PSE programs aligned with the mission of the university.

The directors stated that they as well as the other PSE staff members collaborated with local businesses and various departments on campus to develop internships or work experiences for the students in the PSE program. Each participant stated they looked at the local campus to identify work experiences to reduce the need for transportation, but if the experiences did not meet the student's person-centered plan, they looked for opportunities in the surrounding community. Since internships and work experiences are individualized, there is not "a go to list" for internship placements. For each student a personal connection is made to develop the work experience. Participant 1 stated: "I'm not shy. I will use my connections or who I know to help get my students an authentic work experience that they desire."

To help create a positive work experience for the PSE student, mentors could be present for the duration of the scheduled time or just be there as needed. Some PSE programs have a job coach, or a mentor serve in the role of a job coach. The participants in this study have not found any extenuating situations where a mentor was not able to provide the minimal support needed for the PSE student to be successful in the internship. As well, they have stated the PSE program directors have not been asked to provide any additional support or training for the internship or work site managers to carry out the work experience. They have found that by explaining the goals of the PSE program and having the mentors scheduled as needed, most community placements are open to providing an inclusive work experience.

All participants expressed that the programs are continually adjusting to meet the needs and goals the students have. Each participant shared how the program adjusted when they had to shift from face-to-face instruction to online instruction. The expectation was set that all campus programs were to use a form of online learning. PSE students were supported and attended classes as any other college student was expected to. One participant mentioned that one of their students requested to enroll in the program virtually. Another student wanted to be enrolled full-time, but only wanted to be on campus part-time. Participant 8 shared:

> At first, I thought that wasn't meeting the idea of attending a PSE program to be included in a college community. However, when advising other students, I would help them develop a schedule based on what they requested if the course schedule and program allowed it. So naturally I had to figure out how to work with the students to make it work. While this was a challenge, it showed the student's ability to be a self-advocate.

Participant 9 shared that when they first started, students were auditing classes, but they found that there was a need for courses to be developed for the PSE students to take. These courses were designed to focus more on skill development that could be applied to other courses or to help prepare them for employment. Participant 10 shared:

> Our instructors reflect on their courses year to year like any other professor does. They have adapted or adjusted a course to meet the current needs of the students. The PSE faculty reflect on what they see students had issues with and adjusted their instruction to make sure in the future the students can get those authentic

educational experiences. In our program we saw this when we had to adjust and move instruction online. The faculty of the PSE program moved the program to be online within a week just like the rest of the campus.

Participant 1 stated:

The faculty are reflective in their instructional practices and felt students understood the content. However, the faculty decided to change the sequence of some of the courses or to develop another course to expand on the students' understanding of the content. What I feel is unique about the faculty in our program is they all have a child with a disability, and they developed courses for the PSE program based on their own personal content special area. They took their personal experiences with their child, knowing what they needed and developed courses in their specialized area. We were lucky to have members of the university community willing to be actively involved in developing the courses for the program.

Each participant shared where they would like to see the PSE program in the next five years. Many wanted to expand the program to have more students enrolled. Whereas other programs addressed on-campus living. Four of the ten programs have students living in dorms on campus. There were five programs where students were commuters. Two of the PSE programs' students were attending the program as a high school student completing their transition program through the PSE program. Participant 7 disclosed that the school district that the students attend supports the independent living piece as a simulation.

The district rents an apartment and those students who are in the program and are 18, can live in this apartment. They can sign up for a week to stay and live in the apartment Sunday till Friday. There is a trained coach (mentor) that is there for support.

One of the programs is located at a community college, where there is not a housing option for any student. Those PSE programs that have students residing in the dorms addressed how they were always looking for ways to help develop and foster independent living skills. Living in a dorm setting gives the students greater social skill development and other independent living skill development, but there are limitations. Participant 6 revealed:

We have minimal support honestly when getting students on campus. As the students settled into living on campus more support became available, but there is a lot of adjustment like any other freshman living away from home for the first time. The support becomes focused on roommate conflicts, scheduling, and what to do during down time. Things we are starting to plan for is we have one student who wants to move to an apartment off campus with a friend. When talking with them about their own goals, they want to live in an off-campus apartment their last year.

In the future, program directors would like to see that as the student progresses in the program they can move to the apartments on campus or find an off-campus apartment for the students to reside in. When students are not living on campus, directors shared ways they have been able to develop independent living skills. Participant 3 explained:

One of the doctoral programs we have on campus for the occupational therapists, has worked with our program to address independent living since we do not have students living on campus. These students have done a wonderful job with creating independent living skills workshops. This is the pilot year, and I am looking forward to seeing how it continues to develop and support our students. There is an apartment setup and students go there to work on specific skills.

With these ongoing presentations and meetings, PSE faculty members are aware of where to seek support when they need it. Participant 3 said:

When we first thought to bring this program to campus, we started with deploying the idea by using the institutional assessment that went to faculty, students, and staff. We had a sense that the students would be open to the idea since they grew up in an inclusive space academically compared to what the faculty and staff have been used to. What was very overwhelming was the affirmation and interests from the faculty and staff who would be open to including our PSE students.

Then in explaining how they used this information they stated:

In the planning phase I took the time and went and introduced myself to every department on campus. I went to all the service and resource centers we have on campus. I wanted them to know my face and what I was pitching. The hardest challenge was building the infrastructure; I really needed to know all our institution had to offer so when it came time to develop that piece of our program, I know who to go to.

Participant 10 stated:

Our PSE faculty and staff that works with the instructional side of the program

carefully reviews all the syllabi of the courses the student will audit. They work

with the course faculty to make the accommodations and modifications as the

students need. We also have the peer academic mentors as additional support in

the class.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

It is critical that a qualitative study is trustworthy and for the findings to be found

credible. To ensure the trustworthiness of this study the following procedures were

implemented to ensure just that; credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The data collection strategies used to build upon

the credibility of the results included recorded interviews, themes shared with

participants, selective sampling, and reflective journaling (Babbie, 2017).

Credibility

The findings of this qualitative study have credibility because the participants

were recorded, and their responses were transcribed to analyze the interview data

(Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Gathering information in this manner is shown to be an accurate

representation of participants' input (Creswell, 2018). Selective sampling was used to

ensure the participants were credible sources that could provide valid information for this

study (Babbie, 2017). Member checks is another method to allow for participants to

support the credibility of a study. For those participants who requested it, the emergent

themes were sent by email based on the data collected from the interviews which helps

support the credibility of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Transferability

Transferability, similar in nature to external validity, can be established with qualitative methods when the results can be applied to other situations or people (Burkholder et al., 2016). To support transferability, a detailed explanation of the findings and the setting of the study was provided. I have provided a thick description of the findings. I have included quotes from the transcripts that support the interpreted data and an explanation of the findings. By including detailed information in context, the participants and other readers can understand the key elements that will allow them to transfer the findings to their settings. This means that the findings from this study are transferable to another higher education institution in any state seeking to develop a PSE program. There were no adjustments or changes to the transferability strategies as stated in Chapter 3.

Dependability

Dependability in a qualitative study is important so that one researcher's method can be implemented by another researcher. To ensure dependability in this study I kept accurate records and clearly defined the data collection process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I kept detailed notes as to participant sampling, ethical concerns, and other questions that could have come up during the study. I kept a reflexive journal and email communications with participants were documented. I have included details for each step of the process in communicating with my participants. Audio transcripts were coded to keep the participant and their program's identity confidential. In data collection and analysis, coding and theme identification were essential to the data organization process.

Maintaining consistency during the research process supported the dependability of the study (Creswell, 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability is also important in qualitative research to validate the findings. To achieve confirmability, the interpretation of the results needs to be free of personal biases or agendas (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Reflective journaling has allowed me to record my experiences and my reflective practices. Through the documentation of my experiences, I could reflect on my own influences, perceptions, and background knowledge. I kept accurate notes of the process used to conduct the study to ensure credibility by implementing consistency throughout the study (Creswell, 2018). Journaling allowed me to document decisions, justifications, values, and beliefs that could impact the direction of the study to prevent personal biases from influencing the results. Reflective journaling allowed me to set aside my own perceptions and background knowledge to keep it from influencing and directing the interpretation of the data in this study (Creswell, 2018).

<div align="center">

Summary

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Based on the data collected from the 10 interviews in this basic qualitative study, three themes were identified. The data collection process and analysis of participant information, setting, data collection procedures, results from the data collection and evidence of trustworthiness have been included in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides a discussion and interpretation of the findings and the limitations of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The problem addressed in this basic qualitative study was the need to understand how postsecondary education programs have been developed to provide employment skills and career readiness for their enrolled students. The understanding of PSE program development gained in this study may be useful to program leaders in developing future PSE programs. I sought an in-depth understanding of how postsecondary programs are developed from the perspective of PSE program directors. Interviews were the data source. I used the information from the interviews to identify common themes. In Chapter 5, I interpret the findings in relation to the existing literature on PSE programs. The limitations of the study, recommendations based on the findings, and implications for positive social change will also be addressed.

Interpretation of the Findings

To address the gap in practice, I sought an understanding of how PSE programs are designed and developed. This focus was needed because much of the current literature I reviewed is focused on the outcomes of these programs. The findings from this study answer the research question. Data analysis yielded three themes related to PSE programs:

- support for normalization and person-centered planning as a key part of the mission
- use of the college student body to provide peer mentorship for program participants

- a commitment to ongoing program development to provide high-quality

  postsecondary experiences for students

The conceptual framework of this study was Dewey's (1938) experiential learning theory. Dewey's theory explains how individuals learn context within an experience and acquire knowledge through the practice of doing rather than hearing or reading about the concept (see also Laverick et al., 2020). The theory was appropriate for this study because the aim of PSE programs is to give students with intellectual disabilities an authentic learning experience for career development and independent living.

Every participant shared that students who were enrolled in the PSE program were expected to register for one or more college courses to audit or to receive credit. Students participate in courses in which they can have modifications or accommodations made based on the course syllabus. Modifications and accommodations are made in collaboration with the faculty member who is instructing the course (Griffin, et al., 2016). The concept of students auditing a class comes from the principle of normalization, the intent of which is to encourage inclusion and for the PSE program students to learn amongst their college peers (Francisco et al., 2020). PSE program directors in this study stated that with support from PSE faculty, peer mentors, and the university faculty, PSE students were receiving adequate instruction to prepare for independence.

Participating program directors employed the principle of normalization in developing a PSE program to ensure that students with intellectual disabilities were fully immersed in the college experience like their peers without intellectual disabilities (see Francisco et al., 2020). Students would tour the college and learn about the PSE program.

They would complete an application and participate in an interview. Once the admissions team determined who would be invited to attend, the student had the choice to accept or decline admission to the program. Students would then be advised to follow a plan of study that was developed for the PSE program. Based on the plan of study and the specific design of the PSE program, students would enroll in courses to audit, courses designed for the program, or courses for degree-seeking credit. Again, based on the program some would be enrolled in internships (work placement) or would take a class to learn about career development to help them towards selecting internship placements. The plan of study is developed with each PSE program student, to support person-centered planning (Blaskiwitz et al., 2020).

Most of the participants indicated that the admissions process followed the same standards as that of any other university program. Applicants were required to submit documentation such as their most recent IEP and evaluation report so that staff could understand the strengths and areas of need of the applicant. The campus visits and interviews, in addition to the information from the application, allowed the admissions team to become familiar with the applicant. The administrative team also learned whether the PSE program could support and help the applicant reach their goals.

When developing the plan of study, many program leaders used an existing academic program as their model and made modifications to the criteria for completion to fit the needs of their program. Some program leaders focused on career and independent skill development to build the foundation of the courses and enable PSE program students to learn and develop skills through application (see Green et al., 2017). The

students are actively engaged in learning and applying what they were learning in the classroom and in their independent lives. An example given by Participant 2 was that if a student is interested in working with children, they would audit an education foundations class, and the PSE program would arrange for an internship to occur at a local childcare center. The focus was to ensure that the PSE program has: (a) courses that build on student interest, (b) content and course assignments that are functional, and (c) the ability for students to apply what they learned in a course to another area of independence or career development.

The participants shared different experiences of developing programs. Many followed the pathway requiring approval from campus administration as they would have followed to create a new curriculum program on campus. By having collaborative meetings and using resources from other campuses and Think College, PSE program leaders were able to create programs. Program directors shared their experiences of being flexible but firm in following the mission of their program to bring an inclusive postsecondary program to the university to help those with intellectual disabilities to continue their education and work towards a more independent adult life.

Programs could also apply to receive additional funding. One option was to apply to be recognized as a Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP). To earn this distinction, program leaders have to demonstrate that: (a) their program provides support for students with intellectual disabilities; (b) students are seeking to continue academic, career and technical, and independent living instruction at a higher education institution to prepare for employment; (c) students physically attend the institution; (d) the program provides

advising and curriculum structure; and (e) students with intellectual disabilities have opportunities to be socially and academically integrated with nondisabled students to the maximum extent possible (Federal Student Aid, n.d.). They also must demonstrate that students do one or more of the following:

- take credit-bearing courses with students without disabilities

- audit or participate in courses with students without disabilities (not for credit)

- take non-credit-bearing, nondegree courses with students without disabilities, or

- participate in internships or work-based training in settings with other individuals (Federal Student Aid, n.d.).

Another funding option is Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID), a federal funding program from the United States Department of Education. PSE program leaders need to apply and address how they:

- provide individual supports and services for academic and social inclusion in academic courses, extracurricular activities, and other aspects in higher education;

- work collaboratively with local education agencies to support students who are still eligible for special education and related services under IDEA;

- have a plan for sustainability for the program after the funding period;

- the program has a meaningful credential for students once completing the program; and

- students participate in a program that focuses on academic enrichment; socialization; independent living skills, including self-advocacy skills; integrated work experiences and career skills that lead to employment (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Lastly, person-centered planning must be used in the development of the course of study for each student (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Many of the participants explained they were still in the pilot phase of the program and that COVID-19 had affected their PSE program. They learned firsthand the importance of being flexible but maintaining the path to achieve the goals that were developed. Participants 3 and 4 both likened developing the program to "flying the plane while we are still building it." Participant 4 added to that by saying, "We are growing with purpose." None of the programs developed the same way. Some program leaders reported using the resources provided by Think College. Others led Comprehensive Transition Programs, and some represented programs that qualified for federal funding through the Department of Education. The directors all stated that based on the criteria for either of these funding mechanisms, they would continue to maintain the foundation of how they established the PSE program. They indicated that how they developed the program had helped them to meet the goals of the program and that their students had achieved success. Programs with multiple cohorts who had completed the PSE program were able to report 85% or more students as employed after completing the program.

As Francis et al. (2018) has found there are significant waitlists and delays in services for those who qualify for services with OVR. However, while attending the PSE

program, participants can continue their education and get the support needed in employment and independence development (Zhang et al., 2018). Using mentors in both the academic and internship settings allowed for students to be actively engaged on the first day. Individuals with intellectual disabilities enrolled in PSE programs are not waiting for services to be approved or for OVR to align services to meet the needs of the individual. Mentors are trained and are scheduled based on the needs of the PSE program students. Students can have access to authentic internships or work experiences with the support of the mentors. Mentors allow for students to actively participate in college courses. Participant 1 shared with enthusiasm:

> I think people are genuinely good, and they want what is best for all. Our program expanded due to who our mentors are. We started as a once-a-year event, then our campus students pushed to offer more, and we went to a weekly activity. These students then requested to have more of an inclusive program on campus.

This shows that it is possible to support an inclusive program by having peers work in a mentoring position. Having mentors as a piece of the PSE program allows for the directors and staff to schedule PSE program students where they want to be. PSE program students can select courses, be involved in clubs and organizations, and attend events based on their interests. Mentors are matched with PSE program students based on interests and schedule alignment. This type of mentoring allows for greater flexibility for the PSE program student to engage in the inclusive higher education setting (Burgin et al., 2017). The experiences that students with intellectual disabilities have access to because of the mentoring in place demonstrate the importance of having PSE programs

on a college campus as nowhere else can the individuals with intellectual disabilities simultaneously participate in college level courses, work experiences, and develop social and independent living skills.

Limitations of the Study

There are always limitations in qualitative data collection based on the narrative conversations between the researcher and participants. The possibility exists that the conversation can be inadvertently swayed, based on how the participant may answer a question (Creswell, 2018). To reduce researcher bias, I included all information; all shared statements were taken into consideration and answers were not embellished to impact the results of the study. Bias was minimized by reviewing the recordings, transcripts, notes and following the interview protocol. Following the protocols ensured the interviews were conducted in a consistent manner. By maintaining the structure of the protocols and being consistent, the opportunity for my own biases to influence the participants' views and affect the data were minimized.

Data were collected from only one northeastern state. However, this state has a fair number of PSE programs considering the overall population of the state. This study's sample size could be seen as a limitation but based on the narrative feedback from participant conversations transferability was not affected. Additionally, scholars in this state and the program directors have an active research agenda to help support program development. All PSE program directors shared that they receive many requests to participate in research studies. Several of the participants shared that they received about 100 requests a year, while they are also working on their own research. So, while this

sample size of 10 seems small, it represents about 60% of those who could have participated from this state.

There are other factors that could serve as limitations in the study such as participants' experiences and the settings of the study. This study required that the participant be the director or a lead faculty member of the PSE program, but more importantly, they needed to understand how the program was developed. While some of the participants were not part of the original faculty at their PSE program site, they all were able to discuss the history of the program at length. Thus, while some participants were not part of the program's creation, all participants were able to contribute valuable information regarding program development and improvements. Additionally, some participants were hesitant to participate in the study at first, given they viewed their program as unique in that some programs qualified for funding and were identified as a CTP, while others were not. Additionally, the length of time the program had been in existence varied, as did who is eligible to apply for admission. Thus, transferability could be affected based on how the participant felt they could contribute to the answering of the questions. However, this diversity within the programs could also be considered a strength of the study as it provided varied perspectives of program development rather than homogeneous experiences.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, data analysis, and current literature, I would recommend additional research based on the findings of this study. Recommendations for further investigation are:

1. This study was limited to the investigation of how PSE programs were developed to support education and employment. It is recommended that a study investigate how instruction and transportation is made available to give students access to their surrounding community. The barriers to accessing transportation could potentially limit employment outcomes after completion of the PSE program. If an individual does not have a reliable means of transportation, it could hinder their ability to stay employed.

2. More research is needed to gain an understanding of the admissions process and how students with intellectual disabilities are selected for admission to a PSE program. While participants gave a brief description of the process, another study could focus on what characteristics of an intellectual disability supports a student's admission to a PSE program.

3. More research is needed to obtain an understanding of the financial impact PSE programs have on postsecondary higher education institutions. For example, while there are federal grants awarded to CTPs, more funding might incentivize higher education institutions to develop new programs and/or expand current programs.

Implications

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate and understand how a PSE program for individuals with intellectual disabilities is developed. Data collected from this study allowed me to explore the research question posed and the findings contribute to the current literature to support the development of future programs. The

findings of this study revealed many of the positive components of PSE programs and identified some of the challenges that could occur while developing a PSE program.

The first element of social change from this study was to bring awareness to what other PSE programs have implemented. This shared information can allow directors and instructional staff to reflect on their current practices and engage in strategic planning. Many directors stated a goal would be to increase program enrollment. By examining current practices and making possible adjustments it could enable PSE programs to increase enrollment. One example would be to seek more funding for program students through government advocacy or engaging with foundations and non-profit organizations.

The second element of social change was to embrace the differences in how each program was developed. This study has the potential to foster positive social change by promoting inclusive higher education programs for those with intellectual disabilities. By studying the experiences of these directors and hearing their stories others can examine the need for the development and implementation of such a program at their postsecondary institutions. This study can serve as a bridge to provide information as to how to make postsecondary education for those with intellectual disabilities more accessible.

The third element of social change is related to the welfare of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Individuals with intellectual disabilities will realize better independent living and employment opportunities as a result of successful PSE programs. This will improve their quality of life and enable them to become active members of their

community. As individuals with intellectual disabilities are more visible in their communities, it can help overcome the stigmas they face and in turn provide more social and employment opportunities going forward.

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate and understand how PSE programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities are developed. The data collected from interviews allowed for the identification of the processes and practices that need to be in place to develop a PSE program that provides education and employment skills to individuals with intellectual disabilities. Through the semistructured interviews conducted over Zoom, I was able to gain a better understanding of how the programs focus on instruction and supportive practices to develop and support employment skill acquisition. The results indicated that PSE program directors must ensure inclusive practices are in place for all aspects of the program. PSE program students need to be learning in college courses alongside their college peers. The development of the PSE program mirrors other higher education programs, where students can select courses that suit their interests. This approach meets the spirit of person-centered planning for the students. When learning to develop employment skills, students are involved in community-based work experiences. They are working in their community and when support is needed, they are getting that from the employer or from a peer mentor.

The problem in this basic qualitative study was that little was known about how postsecondary education programs are developed to provide employment skills training and education to individuals with intellectual disabilities, which limits the number of

programs in existence to serve these students. Therefore, individuals who are employable but in need of skill development are not able to access education at a postsecondary higher education institution. In addressing the problem, I have learned that to create a program to address employment skill development prospective program directors need to: (a) assess how their program could align with the mission and goals of the university, (b) seek out stakeholders in both the administration and faculty to create buy-in and find out what expertise is available to help in program development, (c) collaborate with faculty to develop authentic learning opportunities in traditional college courses, (d) develop a strong peer mentoring program, (e) network with local businesses to find employment opportunities and, (f) work to secure housing and transportation to ensure students develop independent living skills and can access authentic work experiences off campus. The findings of this study will support positive social change as more information is now available explaining how PSE programs are developed and how these programs are providing authentic educational and employment skill development experiences to enable individuals in the intellectual disabilities community to gain meaningful employment.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in Doctoral Study on Postsecondary Education

Programs

Dear ----,

My name is Jocelyn McGlynn, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am contacting you today to invite you to participate in a study about the development of Post-Secondary Education (PSE) programs. Attached you will find the consent form that gives you additional information about the study.

Please reply as requested in the Consent Form if you are willing to participate. If you are willing to participate, please also provide me with dates and times that you may be available for an interview. As well, feel free to contact me with any questions.

If I need to obtain an additional approval from someone at your institution for you to participate, please let me know as I am more than willing to do so.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jocelyn McGlynn

Doctoral Student

Walden University

[email address redacted]

[telephone number redacted] (cell)

Appendix B: Interview Questions

The interview questions for the participants will focus on an overview of the operation of the PSE program, educational practices, and employment skill development. The overview of the operation of the PSE will help give an understanding of barriers the directors or faculty could have faced during the development of the program. While addressing the educational practices this could give information of skills that are identified as prerequisite skills for employment. The employment questions will help guide how PSE programs are addressing unemployment rates. Below are the questions asked of each participant during the semistructured interview.

Overview of the PSE Program

1. What was the impetus for developing the program? Why was it needed?

2. Please describe the overall program and expectations based on each year a student is enrolled.

3. What is the mission of the program?

4. What faculty and staff do you have for the PSE program?

    a. What are the qualifications of the faculty and staff?

    b. How are they prepared for their role within the PSE program?

5. What was the process of developing the program?

    a. What were the challenges during the process?

    b. How were they addressed?

6. Is your program accredited?

    a. What does that mean for your university?

    b.   How did you get accredited?

    c.   What is holding the program back from being accredited?

7. What is the application process?

    a.   How do you determine if a student should be accepted in the program?

8. How has the program developed since its conception? Has it accomplished its goals?

9. Where would you like the program to be in the next 5 years?

Educational Practices

1. What are the skills program creators wanted to focus on in developing the program?

    a.   Have you developed a curriculum or a program scope and sequence?

    b.   Do any of the courses in the program focus on employment skill development? How are those courses developed?

2. Have you found the students to be able to generalize those skills after completing the program?

3. Have you developed internships opportunities for students in the program? If so, how?

    a.   How have you had to support the student during the internship? Are there student transportation needs?

    b.   What needs of the internship host have you had to address?

4. Are there specific companies or businesses in the community that you have partnered with to create employment/internship opportunities?

    a.   How did you develop this partnership?

    b. Have they required a specific skillset that has impacted the curriculum of the program?

5. How did you develop independent living experiences for participants?

    a. Where do students reside?

    b. How did you get approval for them to live on campus?

    c. If they are not on campus, how do you develop independence?

6. What types of tiered supports are given to the students?

7. How have you developed an inclusive relationship with the campus community?

8. How do you support the campus faculty so they can better include the PSE program student into their course?

9. Are there specific completion requirements for students in the program? Do they develop a portfolio, presentations, etc.?

10. How many students are employed after program completion?