



Students with Disabilities at Maryland Colleges and Universities

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Introduction

In an effort to better understand the higher education outcomes of students with disabilities in Maryland, the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), in partnership with the state's higher education institutions and the Maryland Department of Disabilities, created a survey administered to colleges and universities¹ in Maryland to collect retention and completion data on these students. The aggregated data collected reflect the number of students who registered with disability services² at their college or university and report on graduation and retention outcomes for those students.

As more data becomes available, this annual report will be able to provide more detailed outcomes such as degree progress for community college students and six-year graduation rates for students attending Maryland's four-year institutions.

Background

Different laws and requirements dictate the responsibilities secondary and postsecondary institutions, the federal government, and the State have in ensuring disabled students have access to the resources they need to obtain an education.

Public elementary and secondary schools in the United States are mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to provide a free and appropriate public school education to children and youth ages three to 21 with disabilities. By law, public elementary and secondary schools are required to identify students with disabilities and provide needed services and support. These services often are established via an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which documents and describes the special education services a student is to receive while enrolled.

In contrast, higher education institutions are governed by a number of relevant state laws as well as the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act. While these laws protect disabled students, they operate differently than the laws pertaining to elementary and secondary education, putting much of the onus of seeking services and supports on disabled students and their families.

All colleges and universities have an office or individual dedicated to assisting students with disabilities (often named the disability services office, or something similar). The office has procedures and policies in place to guide students and their families. Students are required to self-identify as disabled and to provide documentation (such as the IEP from their K-12 education or diagnostic results identifying the disability) to begin the process of seeking services. Once registered with the disability services office, students can work with faculty and administrators to obtain the accommodations or modifications necessary. Accommodations can include such things as extended time on tests, sign language interpretation, voice recognition, and screen readers. The nature of the disability – whether temporary (such as a broken arm) or permanent (such as congenital visual impairment) – helps define the time frame and scope of the

¹ Surveys were administered to Maryland's 16 community colleges, 13 public four-year institutions, and 13 state-aided independent colleges and universities. As of April 2020, the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) has specified inconsistent reporting regarding data on students seeking services through their Disabilities Office since this collection began. This report contains inaccurate data for UMES; these inaccuracies do not alter statewide figures significantly.

² For the purposes of this report, the terms disability services and disability services office will be used throughout for consistency; it's important to note that the name of this office can be different from campus to campus.

accommodations needed. Once in place, the use of the accommodations available to the student rests solely with the student; colleges and universities are not required to monitor the student's usage of services over time.

Students with Disabilities in Education

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 6,464,096 children ages 3 to 21 years old were served under IDEA in 2013-2014; this represents 12.9% of total enrollment in public schools nationally for 2013-2014.³ In Maryland, 11.9%⁴ (103,074)⁵ of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools were considered disabled in the 2013-2014 academic year.⁶

National counts of disabled students enrolled in postsecondary education are more difficult to ascertain, in part because disabled students in higher education must self-identify. In addition, issues tied to privacy restrict institutions from providing unit-record data on disabled students to state and national agencies. NCES estimates⁷ that there were 2.5 million undergraduate students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education in the 2011-2012 academic year; this was approximately 11.1% of all undergraduates. In this same year, there were approximately 195,000 graduate students with disabilities (5.2% of all graduate students enrolled).

A large national study (National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, or NLTS2),⁸ provides complementary data on the enrollment patterns and higher education outcomes of students with disabilities. According to the NLTS2 report,⁹ young adults with disabilities were less likely to have enrolled in postsecondary education than their peers (60% versus 67%) within eight years of graduating high school. Disabled young adults were more likely to have attended a two-year college (44%) or a technical or vocational school (32%) than their young adult peers (21% and

³ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, retrieved September 25, 2015, from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#bcc>; and National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education," 2000-01 through 2013-14.

⁴ Common Core of Data, Tabulated from Elementary/Secondary Information System, 1/13/2015: <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/> and <https://eddataexpress.ed.gov/state-report.cfm/state/MD/>

⁵ The count was derived from multiplying the total public school enrollment in Maryland in 2014 (866.169) by the percentage figure provided by the Department of Education (11.9%).

⁶ A child with disabilities is defined as one participating in an IEP and designated as a special education student under IDEA.

⁷ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007-08 and 2011-12 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:08 and NPSAS:12). https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/tables/dt14_311.10.asp

⁸ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Waves 2, 3, 4, and 5 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2009 and Newman, Lynn, Mary Wagner, Anne-Marie Knokey, Camille Marder, Katherine Nagle, Debra Shaver, and Xin Wei. "The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults with Disabilities up to 8 Years after High School: A Report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). NCSER 2011-3005." National Center for Special Education Research (2011). Retrieved September 14, 2017 from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncser/pubs/20113005/pdf/20113005.pdf>.

⁹ NLTS2 involves a nationally representative sample of students who were 13 to 16 years old and receiving special education services in December 2000 when the study began. These students were followed until 2010 in an effort to understand their educational, vocational, social, and personal experiences as they transitioned from adolescence to early adulthood.

20% respectively) and less likely than their peers to enroll in a four-year college or university (19% versus 40%). Lastly, of the students included in the study, approximately 41% had completed postsecondary completion rates within eight years.¹⁰

According to the NLTS2, of those students who were identified by their secondary schools as having a disability, only 28% identified themselves as having a disability at their postsecondary institution and subsequently informed their postsecondary schools of their disability. Another 63% of students identified as disabled in secondary school did not consider themselves to have a disability by the time they transitioned to their postsecondary educational institution and therefore did not seek additional support or services. An additional 9% reported that, while they considered themselves disabled, they chose not to disclose their disability to their postsecondary institution.

It is important to practice caution when interpreting and extrapolating these results as representative of all disabled students in postsecondary education. One thing to be mindful of is that these survey results do not include students who become permanently or temporarily disabled while enrolled in higher education; it only includes those identified while enrolled in K-12 public schools. Nor does this study include data on graduate students or those who enroll in postsecondary education outside the eight-year window of the study's parameters.

What can be drawn from these data is that disabled students do attend college and successfully matriculate to graduation. In addition, data reveal that those students who were identified as needing disability services while enrolled in elementary and secondary education do not necessarily seek services once enrolled in college. Therefore, the statewide data collected for this report may underreport the number of disabled students enrolled in Maryland colleges and universities.

Statewide Results

In fiscal year 2016, 13,562 undergraduate students and 823 graduate students were registered with their institutions' disability services office as students with disabilities. This represents 3.1% of all students enrolled in fiscal year 2016. More specifically, this represents 3.6% of undergraduate students enrolled and 1.0% of graduate students enrolled.

Four-Year Institutions

Maryland's public and independent four-year institutions report that 6,662 students were registered as students with disabilities with disability services. The public four-year institutions reported 3,480 undergraduate students and 467 graduate students; the independent institutions reported 2,359 undergraduate students and 356 graduate students.

¹⁰ Comparison data included in the NLTS2 analysis and report were taken from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY97) and the Current Population Survey (CPS2009).

Table 1: Maryland Colleges and Universities: Students Registered with the Disability Services Office as a Percent of Total Enrollment

FY 2016	Public Four-Year Institutions		State-Aided Independent Institutions		Community Colleges		Total	
	Counts	% of enrollment	Counts	% of enrollment	Counts	% of enrollment	Counts	% of enrollment
Undergraduate students registered with Disability Services Office	3,480	2.1%	2,359	7.7%	7,723	4.3%	13,562	3.6%
Total undergraduate enrollment	163,047		30,740		179,824		373,611	
Graduate students registered with Disability Services Office	467	0.9%	356	1.1%	n/a		823	1.0%
Total graduate enrollment	53,990		32,138		n/a		86,128	

Total 12-month enrollment from 2016-2017 *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. Retrieved 9/14/17 from <http://nces.ed.gov>

Table 1 provides these data and includes the total undergraduate and graduate student enrollment for the same 12-month period. In fiscal year 2016, 2.1% of undergraduate students enrolled in the public four-year institutions and 7.7% of the undergraduates enrolled at the independent institutions were registered with disability services. A much smaller percentage (0.9% at the public four-year institutions and 1.1% at the independent institutions) of graduate students were registered with disability services.

It is important to note that these data are lower than the national estimates presented earlier in the report. This may be because the Maryland survey captures students registered with the disability services office, whereas the national figure uses data based on the number of disabled students in the elementary and secondary education pipeline to establish estimates of those who go on to enroll in postsecondary education.

Maryland’s public and independent four-year institutions also reported on the first-time, full-time, degree- or certificate-seeking students who were registered with the disability services office and enrolled in Fall 2015. To obtain a retention rate on those students, institutions also reported the number of these students who returned to the institution in Fall 2016.

The second-year retention rate for these students registered with disability services was 84.6% at the state’s public four-year institutions and 82.0% at the independent institutions. These rates can be compared with the overall institutional retention rates, which were 84.2% and 83.1% and respectively in Fall 2016.¹¹ A comparison of these rates show that, for the both the public four-year institutions and the independent institutions, first-time, full-time students from the Fall 2015 cohort who registered with disability services were retained at comparable rates as all first-time, full-time students from the same cohort (a .4 percentage point difference for the public four-year institutions and a 1.1 percentage point difference for the state-aided independent institutions).

¹¹ Retention rates for the Fall 2015 cohort obtained from 2016 *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. Retrieved 1/9/18 from <http://nces.ed.gov>.

Community Colleges

In fiscal year 2016, 7,723 undergraduate students registered with the disability services office. This represents 4.3% of the total undergraduate enrollment at Maryland's community colleges. Survey results also show that of these students, 934 (12.1%) graduated with an associate's degree or certificate by the end of the fiscal year.

In this first year of the survey, we asked community colleges to report, if their data systems allowed, on outcomes data for the students in the fall 2012 cohort who had registered with the disability services office.¹² Only five of the community colleges were able to report on these outcomes this year; therefore, these data are not included in this report due to concerns as to how representative they are.¹³ All institutions are poised to report on the Fall 2015 cohort of students for the 2020 statewide report.

Conclusions

Data collected from Maryland's colleges and universities show that students are seeking services for their disabilities. The rates of students registered with disability services that are reported by the four-year institutions and community colleges are lower than the national estimates reported earlier in this report (11.1% of undergraduates and 5.2% of graduate students nationwide). One reason for this may be that the Maryland survey captures students registered with the disability services office, whereas the national figure uses estimates based on the number of disabled students in elementary and secondary education.

Another finding is that those students attending Maryland's four-year institutions who were identified in the survey as registering for disability services had second-year retention rates that were comparable to the overall cohort. This suggests that students who seek additional services are obtaining the support and accommodations they need to successfully persist. Their accommodations may help to level the playing field so that they can perform academically as well as their peers.

In coming years, the data collected by MHEC will allow for additional outcome measures to be analyzed, including six-year graduation rates and retention, graduation, and transfer rates for community college students. With these additional measures, Maryland's colleges and universities will be able to track the success of their students seeking disability services, and Maryland will be able to report on statewide results. With this information, institutions will have greater insight into how these students compare to their larger student body and perhaps identify ways to ensure they have the support they need to succeed.

¹² Data are reported using the Degree Progress Analysis model, which examines student outcomes for a cohort of students attempting 18 credits, including developmental credits, within the first two years of entry to the community college.

¹³ Because the Degree Progress Analysis data relies on identifying a cohort within the institutional data, institutions vary on their current capacity to "flag" students who registered with disability services within their student systems. All institutions are putting systems in place so they may report on the Fall 2015 cohort.