UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

A doctoral thesis presented

by

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Abstract

College is an important and significant undertaking for any student, especially for someone with a learning disability. The number of students with a learning disability entering post-secondary education is increasing each year; therefore, it is important for academia to increase its understanding of students with learning disabilities and the perception of their experiences while they navigate their way through college. Using the theoretical framework of Self-Determination Theory, the purpose of this Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study was to understand and describe the experiences of students with a learning disability as they make their way through college. As such, this study sought to answer the following research question: How do upperclassmen college students with a learning disability describe their college learning experiences at a private university located in the Southeast United States? The participants perceived that by concealing their learning disabilities, it would be easier for them and they would avoid being stigmatized. However, they understood in order to receive accommodations they had to self-disclose this information after leaving high school. The participants faced many adversities; however, it was their resilience that made them successful. The findings are relevant for secondary and postsecondary professionals who provide services to students with learning disabilities. However, additional research is needed to explore the perspectives of students with learning and physical disabilities to include diversity such as gender, ethnicity and other characteristics that may be unique to the specific college.

**Keywords:** learning disability, stigma, accommodations, self-determination, and college
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my loving mother, Mrs. Clary Lee Carter who is with me in spirit. She did not go to college; however, she made sure that my three brothers and I had the best education. I know that she would have been very proud of me. I also dedicate this work to my loving son, Samuel Ebo, Jr. who has autism and was my inspiration for selecting my topic for my dissertation. Finally, this work is dedicated to everyone who has a disability because you are truly special members of humanity.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There are a great number of students with learning disabilities (LDs) on college and university campuses (Henderson, 1995; Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004). Although these students have been part of the higher educational environment for a while, Brinkerhoff, McGurie, and Shaw, (2002) explain that it was not until the 1990s that a substantial number of students with LDs attempted college. The number of students with a learning disability (LD) entering post-secondary education is increasing each year (Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004). Learning disability may be defined as a group of disorders manifested by difficulties in the use of speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or performing mathematical calculations (NJCLD, 1994). A learning disability is sometimes referred to as “the invisible handicap” because usually there is no visible indication of a problem. Although there are more students with learning disabilities attending postsecondary education today, these students still face some of the same difficulties in college (i.e., study skills, academic skills, self-esteem) as they did in high school (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). Nevertheless, this population struggles through college. Longo (1988) argues that this population “poses the greatest challenge to higher education’s ability to accept and adapt to the diversity than any population accommodated thus far” (p. 10).

Legislative acts such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 have made it possible for students with LD to enroll in colleges and universities (Hadley, 2007). Consequently, institutions of higher education must be prepared to effectively educate students with LD because of the increasing numbers of these students on college and university campuses.
Generally, college students with a LD are more vulnerable to academic stress and failure than students without a LD (Cosden & McNamara, 1997). Some studies have shown that, compared to non-LD college students, LD college students report lower self-esteem, higher rates of failure, and lower college graduation rates (Vogel & Adelman, 1992). Individuals with LDs are the fastest growing group choosing to attend higher education. However, their attendance and graduation rates are still below those of their peers without disabilities. Oftentimes when these students make it to a higher educational institution they experience further difficulties in staying in school. Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, and Edgar (2000) conducted a study that examined the higher education attendance and completion rates of high school graduates with and without LDs. They found that only 8.5% of students with LDs had attended a four-year college five years after graduation from high school when compared to 62.1% of their peers without disabilities (Murray et al., 2000). Often times, students with LDs struggle in college, and when they are faced with challenges, may become stressed, develop anxiety, lose their self-confidence and have difficulties with their academics (Reed, et al., 2009; Connor, 2012). Rice, FitzGerald, Whaley, and Gibbs (1995) suggest college students with LD sometimes feel lonely, isolated and experience difficulties with adjusting to being away from family. Thus, understanding the experiences of college students with LDs, self-determination and their perceptions of the accommodations and support services they received is an important step in supporting them in higher education. Moreover, exploring the perceptions of students with LDs in higher education may help to understand the wide gap in students receiving services from high school to college.
Problem Statement

Students with LDs are attending institutions of higher education at an increasing rate and their attendance has steadily increased over the past two decades (Henderson, 1995; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Heiman & Precel 2003; Troiano, 2003; Foley, 2006; Gerber, Johnson, & Zascavage, 2008; & DaDeppo 2009). Earlier literature by Heyward (1993) argues that colleges and universities have made efforts to address the needs of this population. Heyward (1993) also argues that students with LDs accuse colleges and universities of ignoring their needs and seek to avoid their responsibilities imposed by the law. Heyward (1993) further posits that institutions of higher education claim the students with LDs request more than the requirements of the law. Still, there is common agreement in the literature that institutions of higher education are behind in their efforts to understand and provide service to LD students. Earlier literature by Berk (1983) suggests that the disagreement and confusion that exists in the field of learning disabilities goes back to the basic problem of defining the term. National Joint Committee on Learning Disability (NJCLD) (1994) defines LD as:

Learning disability is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction. (p. 16)

According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), approximately 17% of students with a LD receive accommodations and support at college, compared to 94% of high school students with LD (2014). Moreover, the college completion rate for students with LD is 41%, compared to 52% of students without LDs (Finch, 2014).
Justification for the Research Problem

Borkowski, Carr, Rellinger, and Pressley (1990) suggest in their study that students with LDs sometimes experience lack of motivation, low self-esteem, and limitations in academics while in college. Additionally, Eckes and Ochoa (2005) concur with Borkowski et al (1990) about the students having difficulties in their academics and remind us that the burden of having their disability diagnosed is that of the student. A study conducted by West, Kregel, Getzel, Zhu, Ipsen and Martin (1993) showed that the majority of the 40 participates (colleges students with a LD) indicated that they had encountered barriers to their education such as a lack of understanding and cooperation from administrators, faculty, staff, and other students; lack of adaptive aids and other accommodations. Paul (2000) completed a study that focused on students with LDs, college environments, support services, academic achievement, and adjustment to disability. It was evident in the study that students with LDs can lead more effective educational experiences if they receive respect and cooperation from faculty, staff, students and administration. Reis (1997) conducted a study by interviewing 12 successful college students with a LD about their college experiences. The participants revealed that they experienced social problems, difficulties with instructors, and frustration with certain academic areas. A case study by Synatschk (1994) examined the experiences of five college students with a LD. The participants reported that they experienced a conflict between their desire to be independent and their desire to use services and accommodations available to them.

Generally, college students with a LD are more likely to experience academic stress and failure than non-LD students (Cosden & McNamara, 1997). Vogel and Adelman (1992) point out that there are studies that indicate that, compared to non-LD students, LD college students
report lower self-esteem, self-determination, higher rates of failure, and lower college graduation rates.

**Deficiencies in the Evidence**

Troianno (2003) posits “Students with learning disabilities are attending college at an increasing rate. Still little is known about the phenomenon of experiencing a learning disability in postsecondary education” (p. 404). Stage and Milne (1996) also point out that students with LDs are attending colleges and universities at a faster rate today than in the past; however, research on this population is still limited. Baron, Phillips and Stalker (1996) remind us that these students encounter problems and barriers and little research has examined these problems and barriers. However, Hurst (1996) points out the lived experience of students with LDs is what has been missing from previous studies. Fuller, Healey, Bradley and Hall (2005) articulate that little research has been initiated in response to Hurst's call and practically none has systematically analyzed a large sample of students with LDs and their experiences in higher education. While these studies have identified some experiences of college students with LDs, few studies have examined how self-determination has assisted with their successful educational outcomes. This research helps to further understand the self-determination of college students with LDs as they navigate their way through higher education at Cusseta University (CU). Currently, research involving students with LDs and their experiences while enrolled at institutions of higher education is inadequate and insufficient. This study helps to fill in this research gap.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis study was to describe and better understand the experiences of college students with LDs at a private university located in the Southeast United States and how they make sense of these experiences as it relates to self-determination. Understanding this experience may help future students with learning disabilities advocate for themselves and access supports within higher education in order to graduate.

Research Question

How do upperclassmen college students with a learning disability describe their college learning experiences at a private university located in the Southeast United States?

Theoretical Framework

Researchers Edward Deci and Richard Ryan developed Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in 1985 (Janssen, S.; Van, M.; & De Jong, M., 2013). In the early 1970s, research on SDT evolved from studies that compared intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Lepper, Greene & Nisbett, 1973). For more than two decades, researchers have used SDT in the study of human motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Vansteenkiste, Niemiec, & Soenens, 2010). Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan 1985, 1991) was used to guide this study because it is a framework of motivation that proposes that motivation is multidimensional, and resides along a continuum of self-determination ranging from amotivation through extrinsic motivation, to intrinsic motivation. Moreover, self-determination has been further defined to give greater detail to the conceptual framework as follows:
Self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one’s strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults. (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, and Wehmeyer in Field, 1988, p. 2)

Self-determination theory is a macro-theory of human motivation and personality that focuses on the degree to which an individual’s behavior is self-motivated and self-determined (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Rayan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2002). According to SDT, individuals have a natural tendency towards developing self and the theory identifies factors that support intrinsic motivation. There are three psychological needs that must be satisfied to foster psychological health and well-being: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci, & Ryan, 2002). Autonomy “refers to being the perceived origin or source of one’s own behavior” (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 8). Moreover, an individual has a need to be independent and has the belief that they are in control of actions. Deci and Ryan (2002) define competence as “feeling effective in one’s ongoing interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one’s capacities” (p. 7). Relatedness is referred to as a desire to feel connected to other individuals. In other words, relatedness deals with the need that individuals want what they are doing to be connected with their own goals or that it connects them to other individuals. Thus, SDT has broad and behavior-specific implications for understanding the experiences and self-determination of college student with a LD.

A number of factors suggest that SDT is an appropriate framework for addressing motivation in college students with LD. Self-determination theory allows for a theoretical
examination of autonomy, relatedness, and competency as determinants of motivation. Additionally, the Self-Determination Theory suggests that intrinsic motivation is doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, and thus higher quality learning, flourishes in contexts that satisfy human needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Students with LDs may experience competence when challenged and given prompt feedback, experience autonomy when they feel supported to explore, take initiative and develop and implement solutions for their problems and they experience relatedness when they perceive others listening and responding to them. When these three needs are met, students are more intrinsically motivated and actively engaged in their learning. This theoretical framework provided an excellent lens for understanding how students with LDs successfully navigate their way through college. The theory will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

**Significance of the Problem**

The Rehabilitation Act of the 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibit postsecondary institutions from discriminating against students with disabilities. However, postsecondary institutions report that it is difficult to provide college students with disabilities accommodations that meet the requirement of the two Acts (Brickerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992), which may be why faculty and staff do not know the law or are unfamiliar with the legal implications of the laws (Cook, Rumrill & Tankersley, 2009).

Studies show that faculty struggle with ethical concerns in balancing the rights of students with learning disabilities with the academic integrity of the course, program of study, and institution (McCarthy & Campbell, 1993; Nelson, Smith, & Dodd, 1991). Therefore, this study was significant because it brought awareness to the need of training for faculty and staff. Some faculty may feel insecure when teaching and interacting with students with LD. Baggett
(1994) conducted a study at a large state university and found that faculty lacked experience teaching students with LDs, were unfamiliar with the various disability rights and laws, and were unfamiliar with the various university-wide services available to these students with LDs. Moreover, a study by Leyser, Vogel, Wyland, and Brulle (1998) revealed that faculty had limited training in LDs, limited knowledge, and skills for making accommodations, and unfamiliarity with disability laws and university resources; consequently, there is a major need for training and development activities for faculty. Additionally, a study by Aksamit, Morris, and Leuenberger, (1987) found that college faculty had limited knowledge of students with a LD. College students with LDs should have confidence and be able to feel comfortable in the classrooms, without having to worry about being labeled, stigmatized or stereotyped. Faculty members serve in a leadership role and it is vital that they do not characterize students with a LD as being a certain type and stereotype against them. Having basic knowledge of specific LDs and the characteristics of those disabling conditions can benefit the faculty and staff. Without the proper knowledge or understanding there is a possibility that faculty may assume that students with a LD may be trying to cheat or beat the system (Cook, Rumrill & Tankersley, 2009).

Relating the Discussion to Audiences

The significance and relevance of this study may assist postsecondary institutions to improve accommodations and programming within their own student disability office. Lerner (2003) defines accommodations as modifications, adjustments and services provided to make educational classes more manageable for students with LDs.

College administrators can use the findings from the proposed study to improve and establish new programs that serve to enhance students’ with LD experiences and promote self-
determination to increase their chances of postsecondary academic success. Moreover, it may contribute to educational knowledge by enhancing the literature related to students with LDs in higher education, and the literature on self-determination as it relates to students succeeding in college. Additionally, findings may encourage and support educational policymakers and practitioners actions to create and support initiatives that will give LD students the opportunity to develop the behavioral, cognitive, and social dispositions, skills, and capabilities required for success in college (Conley, 2007, 2010; and Darling-Hammond, 2000, 2010).

The study may also be useful to secondary educators. The amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Act, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services initiatives and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 established rights for students with disabilities and outlined responsibilities for secondary schools. Secondary schools are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that students with LDs receive a high school education and assist in their transition from secondary education to post education (Brackin, 2005).

Students with LDs who seek accommodations at Cusseta University (CU) (pseudonym) may benefit from this study. This study may provide information about the levels to which positive or negative faculty attitudes exist at CU in order to better understand the experiences of this unique student population. The data that were collected and analyzed may be used to justify training programs, workshops, or student-centered support groups for this population. Information generated from this proposed study may also be used to assist administrators in the overall understanding of the campus climate for this underrepresented group and for other underrepresented groups.

This proposed study may be helpful to CU administrators in establishing an Office of Disability Services and a program to provide services for students with disabilities which may
enhance their educational success, personal development and give them equal access. This study may be used as a guide for administrators to build an office that provides a variety of assistive services that may be tailored to individual student needs.

Students with LDs entering the realm of higher education are another likely population who may benefit from this study. This population is coming from an environment that worked vigorously with students with LDs. At the high school level, a formal plan (IEP or 504 Plan) makes it the school's responsibility to arrange for the student to receive accommodations. Whereas, at the post-secondary level, the student must, once approved, request his or her accommodations each time that they are needed.

Many students may not be aware of the differences and their new responsibilities and this may affect their survival in college. Most high school students with disabilities receive special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Upon the completion of high school, these students no longer are eligible to receive services through IDEA; however, they may be eligible for academic accommodations under Title II or Title III of the ADA, depending on whether they attend a public or private college or university, or under Section 504.

Positionality Statement

Personal Experience

As I reflect on my positionality, I am aware of the potential bias that may occur. My son was diagnosed with a LD at the age of two. It was a struggle for my son to read, write, and solve simple mathematics problems. As a mother it was hard for me to see my son struggle and I worked with him constantly. One day, it occurred to me that it was not that my son could not
learn, he learned differently. My son did not attend college; however, he graduated from high school. There were ups and downs and some setbacks; however, he was triumphant and today, I am still proud of him.

It is my belief that despite having a LD, all students can learn and they do so by doing it differently. I believe that students with LDs have a great deal of self-determination because they too, want to be successful. It may take them longer to achieve their goals, but they will and the victory will be that much greater. I am aware of my positionality and I kept an open mind and was aware of my personal biases as I entered into the research process.

Professional Experience

As an Orientation instructor at CU, I have an opportunity to talk to first year college students about their college experiences. I feel honored to teach the first year students. Some students with LDs indicate that they do not have a problem with college; however, the majority of the students with LDs expressed their difficulties. The freshmen students in my orientation class were given a writing assignment to discuss the difficulties they were experiencing in college. There were several students in the class who self-identified as having a LD and the top ten difficulties they reported were: (a) there is too much work in college; (b) textbooks are hard to read and comprehend; (c) classes are too large; (d) instructors do not remind them about assignments; (e) the grade “D” is failing in some cases; (f) they are responsible for time management and budgeting their limited finances; (g) often times instructors do not write on the black board, instead they lecture; (h) having to use critical thinking skills; (i) having to adjust their learning styles; and (j) having to seek assistance outside of the classroom because of a learning disability was difficult because they feared they would be labeled as dumb. I was conscious of the difficulties the students identified as I collected data.
When the Counseling Office at CU identifies a student with a LD, it is the Orientation instructor’s responsibility to identify resources available to assist with making the learning process easier and smoother. Additionally, the Orientation Instructor monitors the students’ grades in classes such as math, English and biology and refers the students with a LD to tutorial services on campus when they are failing.

My goal was to be mindful of pitfalls that could influence the research study enabling me to focus on the participants’ responses, thereby, fulfilling the research objectives as they are intended. Therefore, I entered my research study cautiously aware of the positionality that could impact my research: a parent with a child with a LD and as an instructor. However, according to Machi & McEvoy (2012) “by rationally identifying and confronting these views, the researcher can control personal bias and opinion, committing to being open-minded, skeptical, and considerate of research data” (Machi & McEvoy, 2012, p. 19). Thus, by acknowledging my bias from the start, I was better equipped to recognize its effect on my study. However, in an IPA study there is no need to totally bracket my positionality, rather to be mindful of it. I engaged in a double hermeneutic process, where I made sense of how the participants made sense of their experiences as it relates to self-determination.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is sufficient evidence that students with a LD are enrolling in colleges and universities at an increasing rate (Henderson, 1995; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Heiman & Precel 2003; Troiano, 2003; Foley, 2006; Gerber, Johnson, & Zascavage, 2008; & DaDeppo 2009). Therefore, it is important to examine the experiences of those students in order to better know how to assist them in the successful navigation of their college experience. The purpose of this study was to describe and better understand the experiences and self-determination of upperclassmen college students with LDs at a private university located in the Southeast United States. Students with LDs have traditionally encountered some barriers to postsecondary education, ranging from lack of accommodations, professors’ expectations, other students’ perceptions to discouragement by administrators and other stakeholders at the post-secondary level. The research question examined how upperclassmen college students with a learning disability described their college learning experiences?

This chapter provides an in-depth review of the literature related to the topic of the study. The literature review was conducted through post-secondary education databases and disability journals. Key words used in the search were, learning disability, self-determination, higher education, disabilities laws and accommodations. This literature review is organized into eight sections. The first section provides the history of learning disabilities. Types of learning disabilities will follow this section. The third section will discuss the statutory laws affecting the LD field. Challenges and difficulties faced by college students with LDs will be discussed next. Section five will take a look at accommodations, while section six examines the strategies used by college students with LDs. Section seven explores the dynamics of the Self-Determination Theory. Finally the chapter concludes with a summation.
History of Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities can be traced back to the early 1800s. Some documented cases are as follows: A German physician, Franz Joseph Gall explored the relationship between brain injury and mental impairment in 1802. He noted the effect of brain damage on what today it is called Broca’s aphasia (Hallahan & Mercer, 2001). John Baptiste Bouillaud, Dean of the Medical School of the College of France conducted research in the 1820s and concluded that the frontal anterior lobes of the brain control speech. Pierre Paul Broca is generally known for being the one who promoted the idea that speech functions primarily reside in the left side of the brain in the 1860s (Hallahan & Mercer, 2001). However, it was only in the 1960s and 1970s when the U.S. federal legislation got involved (Hallahan & Mercer, 2001). Thus, LDs may be one of the newest categories recognized by the U.S Department of Education, but the origins of its conceptual foundation are as longstanding, as many of the other disability categories are deep rooted, as many other desirability categories (Hallahan & Mercer, 2001).

Hallahan and Mercer (2001) have divided the history of learning disabilities into the following periods: European Foundation Period (c.1800 to 1920); U.S. Foundation Period (c. 1920 to 1960); Emergent Period (c. 1960 to 1975); Solidification Period (c. 1975 to 1985); and Turbulent Period (c. 1985 to 2000). Moreover, other researchers: Lerner, 2000; Mercer, 1997; and Wiederholt, 1974 have divided the history into similar periods as Hallahan and Mercer (2001).

European Foundation Period (c.1800 to 1920)

There were two main pieces of work relevant to the field of LD during the European Foundation Period: groundbreaking discoveries in the field of neurology occurred and seminal articles and books on reading disabilities were published. The first work that has relevance to
today’s conceptualization of LDs was conducted by Gall in the context of his work on disorders of spoken language in the 19th century (Wiederholt, 1974). Gall noted that some of his patients could not speak; however, they could write down their thought, thus manifesting a pattern of relative strengths and weaknesses in oral and written language (Hammill, 1993).

**U.S. Foundation Period (c. 1920 to 1960)**

By the 1920s, U.S. researchers and clinicians began to take an interest in the work of the Europeans who had been studying brain-behavior relationships and individuals with learning difficulties. Language and reading disabilities and perceptual, perceptual-motor, and attention disabilities were the main focus by the U.S. researchers (Hallahan & Mercer, 2001). Samuel Orton was a key figure in study reading disabilities. According to Orton (1928) children with reading disabilities tended to reverse letters such as b/d and p/q, and words such as saw/was and not/ton. Moreover, Orton (1937) was the first researcher to stress that reading disabilities manifested at a symbolic level appeared to be related to cerebral dysfunction and could be identified among children with average to above-average children.

**Emergent Period (c. 1960 to 1975)**

Learning disabilities began to emerge from 1920-1975 as a formal category in the field of education. During this period the term learning disabilities was introduced; the federal government included LDs on its agenda; organizations for LDs were founded by professionals and parents; and for students with LD emerged (Hallahan & Mercer, 2001, & Fletcher, Lyon, & Fuchs, 2006). Samuel Kirk is recognized as being the originator of the term learning disabilities
(Hallahan & Mercer, 2001, & Fletcher, Lyon, & Fuchs, 2006). Kirk (1962) gave his definition of learning disabilities as:

A learning disability refers to a retardation, disorder, or delayed development in one or more of the processes of speech, language, reading, writing, arithmetic, or other school subject resulting from a psychological handicap caused by a possible cerebral dysfunction and/or emotional or behavioral disturbances. It is not the result of mental retardation, sensory deprivation, or cultural and instructional factors. (p. 263)

By 1963 the learning disability field was moving toward a formal legislative designation of LD as a specific disability with entitlements for civil rights protections. According to Fletcher, Lyons and Fuchs (2006):

The movement was based on Kirk’s and other researchers’ argument that children with LDs (1) had different learning characteristics than children diagnosed with mental retardation or emotional disturbance; (2) manifested learning characteristics that resulted from intrinsic rather than environmental factors; (3) demonstrated learning difficulties that were “unexpected”, given the children’s strengths in other areas; and (4) required specialized educational interventions. (p. 16)

**Solidification Period (c. 1975 to 1985)**

The years from 1975 to 1985 was a period of stability as the learning disability field moved toward finding a definition of learning disabilities as well as methods of identifying students with LDs that was acceptable by all. Congress passed Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. LD officially achieved status as a category eligible for funding for direct services under this law (Hallahan & Mercer, 2001). By the early 1970s, the following definition was formulated:
The term “specific learning disability” means a disorder in one or more of the psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning disabilities which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, or mental retardation, or emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (United States Office of Education (USOE, 1977, p. 65083)

**Turbulent Period (c. 1985 to 2000)**

During this period of LDs history, things have occurred that have solidified the field of LDs; however, there are some issues have threatened to destroy the field. There was an extraordinary growth in the prevalence of LDs (Hallahan & Mercer, 2001). According to USOE (2000), from 1976-1977 to 1998-1999, the number of students identified as having a LD doubled. Additionally, more than 2.8 million students were identified as having a LD, which represents over half of all students with disabilities.

Hallahan and Mercer (2001) point out that areas in which there has been further solidification during this period are definition, the research strands of the LDs research institutes, research on phonological processing, and research on biological causes of learning disabilities. The identification procedures, debate over placement options, and denunciation of the validity of LDs as a real phenomenon by constructivists are issues contributing to the turbulence in the LD field.
In summation, the field of LDs emerged from a social and educational need. LDs constitute a diagnostic category of interest of clinical practice, law and policy. Historically, educators, parents, and other advocates for children have negotiated a special education category subsuming LDs as a means of protecting civil rights and procedural safeguards in law (Lyon & Moats, 1997; Zigmond, 1993). Moreover, if individuals with LDs are to receive the best education possible and be accepted by a caring community, educators must join to stop yet another “education war” that deters special education from being the helping profession it was meant to be (Hallahan & Mercer, 2001).

The following section will discuss the different types of learning disabilities and their characteristics.

**Types of Learning Disabilities**

A learning disability (LD) is not a single disorder; however, they often fall into three categories: dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia (Lyon, 1996; Learning Disabilities and Disorders, n.d.; Vickers, 2010). The following categories are presented to enhance understanding of common disorders encountered in education.

**Dyslexia**

Dyslexia is a reading LD and basic reading problems occur when there is difficulty understanding the relationship between sounds, letters and words. Reading comprehension problems occur when there is an inability to grasp the meaning of words, phrases, and paragraphs (Lyon, 1996; Learning Disabilities and Disorders, n.d.; Vickers, 2010). In other words, dyslexia is characterized by difficulties with accurate word recognition and by poor spelling and the ability to decode. Shaywitz (1989) asserts that dyslexia is characterized by an unexpected difficulty in reading in individuals who otherwise possess the intelligence,
motivation, and schooling that is necessary for accurate and fluent reading. Dyslexia is the most common and carefully studied of the learning disabilities, affecting 80 percent of all those identified as learning-disabled (Lerner, 1989).

Many studies have been conducted on dyslexia (Adams, 1990; Denckl, 1991; & Shaywitz, 1998). Some studies consisted of participants with self-identified reading problems and other studies have included college students and other adults with dyslexia (Snowling, Nation, Moxham, Gallagher & Frith, 1997). Wilson and Lesaux (2000) conducted a study on the phonological processing skills of college students with dyslexia. The study concluded that each individual experiences dyslexia differently. Often time dyslexia is accompanied by difficulties in an individual’s writing abilities.

**Dysgraphia**

Dysgraphia is a learning disability that affects writing abilities. It can present itself as difficulties with spelling, poor handwriting and trouble putting thoughts on paper (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2007). American Psychiatric Association (1994) defines dysgraphia as writing skills that are considerably below those expected given the person’s chronological age, age-appropriate education and measured intelligence.

There is little research on dysgraphia (Nicolson & Fawcett, 2009). However, Smits Engelsman and Van Galen (1997) conducted a study on the quality of motor control in children with dysgraphia and control children. Their finding was dysgraphia was linked with poor motor control, reflecting greater noise in movement production rather than poor letter knowledge. Mather (2003) distinguished between individuals with good reading and poor spelling (dysgraphia), poor reading and poor spelling (dyslexia) and control adolescents. All the poor
spellers showed a deficit under dual task conditions when having to tap with their right hand and judge line orientation at the same time. This finding may be interpreted as a reflection of the left hemisphere processing limitation. Nicolson and Fawcett (2009) conducted a study on dysgraphia and dyslexia found that both LD have a lack of automaticity at the cognitive level, attributable to impairment of procedural learning circuits level. All of the mentioned studies focused on the commonalities and differences between dyslexia and dysgraphia. Dyscalculia is another LD that is prevalent among college students.

**Dyscalculia**

Dyscalculia is a learning disability, which is sometimes called number blindness, and similar to dyslexia, but for numbers (Kadosh & Walsh, 2007; NCLD, 2007; Understanding, 2013). In other words, dyscalculia, a disorder that reflects impaired math skills, all the effort and studying possible still leaves math disconnect for the individual. The term dyscalculia is derived from is composed of the Greek prefix "Dys" which means difficult and the Latin word "Calculare", which means "to count" (Kadosh & Walsh, 2007). Researchers estimate that as much as 7% of the population has dyscalculia, which can be marked by severe difficulties in dealing with numbers despite otherwise normal intelligence (Understanding, 2013). This mathematical disorder has a prevalence of about 5 to 7% (Shaley, 2007), which is approximately the same prevalence as developmental dyslexia (Gabrieli, 2009). A major report by the United Kingdom government concludes, “Developmental dyscalculia is currently the poor relation of dyslexia, with a much lower public profile. But the consequences of dyscalculia are at least as severe as those for dyslexia” (Beddington, Cooper, Field, Goswami, Huppert, Jenkins, Jones,
Kirkwood, Sahakian, & Thomas, 2008, p. 1060). Research on dyscalculia is lagging behind dyslexia. Since 2000, The National Institute of Health (NIH) committed $107.2 million funding dyslexia research but only $2.3 million was committed to dyscalculia research (Bishop, 2010). A study conducted by Bishop (2010) revealed that there is more literature on dyslexia and literature on dysgraphia followed and literature on dyscalculia brought up the rear.

In summary, LD is a disorder in the cognitive and psychological processes that involves difficulties in the acquisition and use of reading, writing, speaking, listening reasoning or mathematical ability (Lyon, 1996; Learning Disabilities and Disorders, n.d.; and Vickers, 2010). The literature shows dyslexia is the most common LD and most researched. Dysgraphia and dyscalculia are less common LD; however, they do exist. Some researchers suggest an individual may have one or a combination of LD and sometimes they are co-dependent on each other. There is some contradictory about dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. Chinn (2004) posits children who have very poor mathematical skills but perform well in languages. Conversely, Attwood (2002) found that 25% of dyslexic learners performed in an above average manner in mathematics. These results suggest that even though dyslexia and dyscalculia is present, they are two separate conditions. Rothman and Cohen (1989) indicate “problem solving for math is the task most often recognized as dependent on both reading and language competence” (p. 133). Dyscalculics may not only find difficulties with actually reading and understanding the word problem but may also find it very hard to translate what is being asked and thus to choose an appropriate operation. Some individuals may experience problems with difficulties in processing sound in a noisy background and this may be referred to as Auditory Processing Disorder (APD). The disorder affects the interpretation of the sounds that goes to the brain. Whereas, others may have a Language Processing Disorder (LPD) and may have
problems understanding what others say because this disorder affects expressive language (Learning Disabilities Association of America, n.d.). However, a LD affects each individual differently.

The next section will discuss laws that protect people with learning disabilities from discrimination in higher educational settings like colleges and universities.

**Statutory Laws**

State-funded schools are covered under Title II of the ADA while private institutions are covered under Title III of the ADA. Institutions receiving federal monies must comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Leuchovius, 1994). Between these two pieces of legislation, nearly every postsecondary education institution in America is required to provide equal access to students with disabilities. Subpart E of the Rehabilitation Act applies specifically to postsecondary education. It states that no academic requirements, rules, or evaluation methods may be discriminatory for individuals because of their disability. However, postsecondary institutions “are not required to compromise on requirements that are essential to the program or course of instruction, that are directly related to licensing requirements, or that alter content or process that is essential to the evaluation” (Sitlington, 2003, p. 105). The student with a LD must be otherwise qualified for the program, course, or institution before being provided reasonable accommodations, and services that are provided through these laws must be at no cost to the student receiving them.

College is an important and significant undertaking for any student, especially for someone with a LD. Usually, college campuses are bustling and students can become overwhelmed with workloads, academic demands, social and extracurricular events. For
students who have a LD, staying organized and focused can be challenging (Masterson, 2008).
It is important for academia to increase its understanding of students with LDs perception of
their difficulties while they navigate their way through college.

**Challenges and Difficulties faced by College Students with Learning Disabilities**

When pursuing a post-secondary education, students with a LD face obstacles to be successful (Heiman & Kariv, 2004) and they also face a range of challenges over and above those faced by students without LD (Durham Webster, 2004). Hadley (2007) also points out that college students with LDs have to deal with the unique challenges presented by their disability, as well as the daily stressors of college life. LD is based on a normal-range of intellectual ability and a show of evidence of a below-average academic achievement score. This includes difficulties in academic skills such as reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic or mathematics, difficulties in foreign language; and evidence of deficits in cognitive process (NJCLD, 1998).

Zwart and Kallemeyn’s (2001) and Carlson and Alley’s (1981) studies of college students with a LD identified inadequate study skills, poor note taking, test taking, listening and scanning skills. Studies have been conducted that focused on students’ difficulties in academic, behavioral and emotional difficulties (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Heiman & Parcel, 2003; Winter & Yaffe, 2000). College students with LD described difficulties in reading; not being able to recall enough details to enable them to show ample evidence of knowledge, especially in writing. The participants reported on insufficient time and difficulties in organization and in managing their time; suffering from a lack of energy to address their difficulties; and memory problems were reported. Another study by DaDeppo (2009) reported that students with a LD often deal with inadequate organization and time management skills.
Similarly, Kaminski, Turnock, Rosen, and Laster (2006) found that college students with LD revealed procrastination as their biggest struggle followed by an inability to manage their time and utilize other study skills. Barton and Fuhrman (1994) point out that these deficiencies in academic skills may impede social adjustment and influence the student’s behavior or emotional adjustment. Moreover, students with learning disabilities show regular challenges with self-regulating behaviors (Reiff, Hatzes, Bramel, & Gibbon, 2001) and Wolf (2001) state that college students with learning disabilities are more likely to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression than their non-LD peers. Students with LDs have a variety of problems that contribute to their poorer academic performance. Due to the nature of their disabilities, they usually need to spend more time and energy on their studies than do their peers (Bireley & Manley, 1980). Available study time is often a valuable commodity in college settings and making less efficient use of it is often a burden and a source of discouragement. In some cases, there may not be an adequate amount of time available for studying all the coursework effectively regardless of the students’ best efforts. In addition, students with LDs often have reading comprehension problems and other learning difficulties accompanied by unrealistic (usually overly optimistic) views of their abilities. These students sometime have difficulty in discovering methods that they can use to increase their academic performance despite these problems, which can easily lead to feelings of frustration and helplessness (Bireley & Manley, 1980). Some studies of college students with LDs disclosed that they had more difficulty adjusting to change, handling academic demands, accepting criticism (Mellard & Hazel, 1992) and adjusting to college life (Saracoglu, Minden, & Wilchesky, 1989). Moreover, some new college students do not know how to interact with college personnel in a proactive manner because these skills may not have been taught at the secondary level (Stodden et al., 2003).
A study by Stage and Milne (1996) revealed that tutoring for some college students with a LD was not effective. The tutors were academically talented college students who desired to earn money; however, they did not know how to teach a LD student. The Office of Disability Services (ODS) did not provide any training to the student tutors and the LD student felt frustrated because they did not receive instruction that they understood. The study also disclosed the ODS paid the tutors $4.50 an hour; however, some of them charged up to $10 an hour. Therefore, the LD students were left to pay the balance and that sometimes caused financial hardships. In the same study by Stage and Milne (1996) students with a LD reported to have a negative self-perception and low self-esteem. The students reported negative feelings of self-consciousness and as a result were reluctant to tell others of their disabilities.

Another challenge students with a LD face is the lack of proficiency in the use of learning technologies which is needed to be prepared for and succeed in college. Thus, Marino, Marino, and Shaw (2006) predict that some college students with a LD will enter postsecondary education with limited knowledge and fluency in the use of those technologies and will need assistance to develop these skills. A survey of college students with LDs found that they had a low level of comfort with e-mail and multitasking on a computer (Parker & Banerjee, 2007).

Students are faced by difficulties and challenges in college; however, students with a LD are more likely to encounter them (Durham Wester, 2004). Challenges faced by a college student with a LD include academics, social, self-perception, low self-esteem, behavioral, emotional, and organizational and time management skills. Heiman and Kariv (2004) summarize the challenges and difficulties college students face with the following:
Students with LD described difficulties in reading; not being able to remember formulae, or to identify formulae by name, or to remember enough details to enable them to show evidence of knowledge, especially in writing. They reported on insufficient time and difficulties in organization and in managing their time; suffering from a lack of energy to address their difficulties; and mentioned memory problems. These deficiencies in academic skills may impede social adjustment and influence the individual’s behavior or emotional adjustment. (p. 314)

**Accommodations**

Accommodations are alterations in the way assignments/tasks are presented that allow students with LDs to complete the same assignments/tasks as other students. The accommodations make it possible for students with LDs to show what they know without being impeded by their disability. However, accommodations do not alter the content of assignments, give students an unfair advantage or in the case of assessments, change what a test measures (NCLD, 2006). Virtually all college students with a LD require some remedial services (Strichart & Mangrum, 1985). Wolf (2001) indicated that colleges and universities are required by Americans with Disabilities ACT (ADA) to provide reasonable academic and program adjustments (“accommodations”) to qualified students with disabilities, including Learning Disabilities (LD) and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Additionally, once the university is on notice of the disability, the school must make “academic adjustments” that are necessary to ensure an opportunity to participate. Such adjustments may include the following: tape recorded lectures, extended time for exams, or the substitution of courses (Eckes and Ochoa, 2005).
In order to receive the protections of either Section 504 or ADA, the student must demonstrate that he or she has a disability that meets the statutory requirements. Disability as defined by ADA is “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities” of the individual, or “a record of such an impairment,’ or “being regarded as having such an impairment” (42 U.S.C. § 12102(2)). Whether or not an individual is disabled for ADA purposes would be determined on an individualized basis (29 C.F.R. § 1630.21(j)). The definition of disability used in Section 504 is the same as the ADA definition (34 C.F.R. § 104.3 (j)). The institution of higher education is entitled to inquire into the nature of the disability, to require documentation of the disability, and to reach its own determination as to whether the disorder is a disability that requires accommodation under the ADA or Section 504.

Ryan (1994) states to accommodate the accelerating demand for services, increasing numbers of colleges and universities are striving to meet and/or exceed the guidelines established under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This is supported by a variety of student support services including note-takers, individual tutoring, counseling, study skills instruction, support groups, and reading and learning disabilities specialists available at many postsecondary institutions (Adelman, 1988).

Progress has been made regarding the acknowledgement of students with LDs at many colleges and universities, some continue to offer minimal assistance and require students with dyslexia and other learning disabilities to fit within the traditional mold of the institution (Bursuck, Rose, Cowen, & Yahaya, 1989).

Academic support programs usually make services available to undergraduate students (Kuo, Hagie, & Miller, 2004). Mull, Sitlington and Alper (2001) point out that the number of support programs available to college students with LDs is expanding each year and the services
available vary from college to college. Usually, these accommodations are offered by academic
skill centers that provide support in specific areas, such as note taking, writing or test preparation
(Kuo et al., 2004). In recent years more comprehensive programs have been designed to foster
independence through enhanced self-esteem, self-advocacy, and self-determination (Troiano,
Liefeld & Trachtenberg, 2010). Thus, a continuum of support services and accommodations are
now available to college students with LDs. The support services may range from compliance
programs that meet the minimum requirements established by law to comprehensive programs
that offer a high degree of structure, quality and support (Troiano, 1999; Vogel, 1993).

A study by Troiano et al., (2010) was conducted by examining 262 college students with
LDs to determine if there was a relationship between their use of academic support services and
college success. The results from the study revealed that the students who used the academic
support services had higher grade points averages than the students who did not use the services.
Moreover, the study also showed that the increased use of academic support services by the
students with LDs had a better chance to graduate. Another study that revealed accommodations
were good for the college students was the study in which Vogel and Adelman (2001) compared
110 college students with LDs to a random stratified sample (RSS) of 153 classmates. The RSS
students did not receive support services and the group of 110 received the services. Vogel and
Aldelman reported that the GPA’s at the end of each academic year were slightly higher for
students with LDs than the RRS group. They also reported that fewer students with LDs received
failing grades compared with the RRS group and the students with LDs were likely to graduate.
It is important to note that in addition to accommodations, students with LDs may compensate
for their challenges by using various strategies, including using compensation skills and relying
on metacognition as discussed in the next section.
Strategies Used by College Students with Learning Disabilities

Having a LD can present academic challenges, but students with LD can excel in college. With the right planning, study strategies and lifestyle choices students with LDs can thrive in college while enjoying other great experiences that come with college. Coping with a LD in postsecondary education requires an active, adaptive process of managing oneself in relation to the competitive learning environment (Cowen, 1988). High levels of academic aptitude, efficient study skills, and positive attitudes are important components of academic performance for all students (Gadzella & Williamson, 1984; Larose & Roy, 1991). Cowen (1988) conducted a study to find out what strategies college students with a LD used and found time management was an important coping strategy for the majority of the participants. They reported studying in a quiet time or place, keeping a daily/weekly schedule, and scheduling a balanced load. Some of the students used regular class attendance and completing all homework to compensate for their poorer test performance. The students reporting reading problems used strategies such as reading in a non-distracting environment, subvocalizing, or purchasing previously highlighted textbooks. A few students reported the maladaptive strategy of avoiding mathematics classes required for graduation. The students who reported problems with spelling, punctuation, and grammar used strategies that included reliance on a dictionary or secretary's spelling list, or the substitution of easier words in an effort to cope with the problem independently. Other strategies used were relying on others to proofread their papers for errors, recording lectures, using word processing for organizing written compositions and correcting spelling errors, using color coding as a method for organizing difficult reading material and auditing a class before taking it.

Studies have been conducted that pointed to specific aspects of learning as being important: motivation, time management, information processing, self-regulated strategy use,
and general study skills (Kern, Fagley, & Miller, 1998; Lazarus, 1991; Ley & Young, 1998; Macan, Shahani, Dipboye, & Phillips, 1990; VanZil-Tamsen & Livingston, 1999; and Kirby, Silvestri, Allingham, Parrila, R., & La Fave, 2008). The use of self-talk in which the participants talked out loud to themselves was a strategy used by college students with a LD was reported in a study by Hollins and Foley (2013). Other strategies used include using typists, using motor behaviors to reinforce learning, just listening instead of taking notes, using visual diagrams, the use of highlighting and writing notes in the margin. While other participants indicated that they wrote things on a sticky note to aid with memorizing materials (Hollins & Foley, 2013). Additionally, some students used course selection as a coping strategy and others reported that they dropped hard subjects (Goldberg & Zern, 1988).

Students with LDs may use compensation strategies to overcome academic difficulties and challenges they may face. Compensation strategies include study strategies, cognitive strategies, compensatory supports (e.g., tape recorders and computer word processing software, and environmental accommodations such as test-taking accommodations (Crux, 1991). Garner (1988) and Mayer (1988) noted that learning strategies comprise behaviors of a learner that are intended to enhance information processing. Instead of focusing on the content, instruction in cognitive strategies focuses on learning how to learn. Specific learning strategies such as repetition, verbal elaboration, organization techniques, paraphrasing, and association come under the control of efficient learners through self-regulation (Res, McGuire, & Neu, 2000).

Another way college students with LDs may compensate for cognitive difficulties is by relying on metacognition; in other words, consciously controlling actions that are too complex to be controlled automatically. Flavell (1978) used a theoretical construct of metacognition to explain the performance of young children in memory research experiments. These children
showed improved recall after being instructed in the use of mnemonic strategies. However, they failed to maintain the strategy of learned mnemonics with the result that their recall performance deteriorated in posttests. Flavell (1978) attempted to explain the children’s poor maintenance performance by suggesting that the young children lack awareness/knowledge of variables that affect remembering - metacognition. Metacognition refers to two things: (a) self-awareness of one's cognitive processes, cognitive strengths and weaknesses, and the match between one's cognitive resources and the task encountered and (b) metacognition refers to self-regulation (Flavell, 1978). Zimmerman (1986) defines metacognition as the ability to adjust behavioral, environmental functioning in response to changing academic demands. Moreover, Pintrich (1994) defines academic metacognition as a construct comprised of three major elements: (a) active control over learning-related behaviors such as when, how much, and with whom a student is learning; (b) self-regulation of motivation and affect, in which students learn how to control their emotions and even use them in goal setting; (c) control over various cognitive strategies for learning, such as rehearsal and memory strategies. It is noteworthy to mention that it is important to emphasize, for students and educators, that strategies are general principles adjusted to fit specific demands and content, not a set of always-applicable skills (Trainin & Swanson, 2005). Trainin and Swanson (2005) conducted a study to examine the way college students with LD compensated for their deficits in phonological processing. The study compared the cognitive and metacognitive performance of students with and without LD. Although achievement levels for both groups were comparable, students with LD scored lower than students without LD in word reading, processing speed, semantic processing, and short-term memory. Differences were also found between groups in self-regulation and number of hours of
studying. It was concluded that students with LD compensated for their processing deficits by relying on verbal abilities, learning strategies, and help seeking.

Having a learning disability is an important issue in campus life because of the growing number of students who are diagnosed that are attending college. Often time, these students are at a disadvantage and have to find ways to navigate their way through college in order to succeed. Some studies show that college students with a LD use various strategies such as developing good time management skills, purchasing used textbooks that are highlighted, the use of self-regulated skills and recording lectures (Crux, 1999; Ley & Young, 1998; Res, McGuire & Neu, 2000). However, sometimes strategies alone may not be enough for college students LDs and using self-determination skills are often helpful to the student.

**Self-Determination**

The literature shows self-determination leads to significant benefits and is a value tool for students with LD (Field, Sarver, & Shaw, 2003). The challenges of learning disabilities place elements of self-determination at direct odds with the learner. "Self-determination has been associated with a broad range of positive outcomes in students with disabilities, including enhanced physical and psychological health, higher self-esteem, and improved general wellbeing" (Anctil, Ishikawa, & Scott, 2008, p. 165). Additionally, academically successful students show increased levels of self-awareness and understanding towards their disability.

Ward (1988) defines self-determination as “the attitudes that lead people to define goals for themselves and the ability to take the initiative to achieve those goals” (p. 2). Therefore, this definition of self-determination can be seen as the actions of: (a) setting goals, (b) identifying steps necessary to reach goals, and (c) problem-solving barriers to goal attainment (Ward, 1988).
This definition contains the key components of choice making, decision-making, problem solving, and goal setting and attainment. Choice making refers “to a process of selecting between alternatives based on individual preferences” (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998, p. 14), whereas decision-making refers “to a broader set of skills that incorporate choice-making as but one component” (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998, p. 14). Decision-making can be broken down into five separate steps:

1. Listing relevant action alternatives
2. Identifying possible consequences of those actions
3. Assessing the probability of each consequence occurring
4. Establishing the relative importance (value or utility) of each consequence
5. Integrating these values and probabilities to identify the most attractive course of action. (Beyth-Maram, Fischhoff, Jacobs, Quadrel, & Furby, 1991, p. 21).

According to Wehmeyer, Agran, and Hughes (1998), “decision making is a process of weighing the adequacy of various solutions” (p. 16), whereas a problem is a perplexing issue whose solution is not readily known (Beyth-Marom et al., 1991; & Wehmeyer et al, 1998). Another definition of self-determination is by Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, and Wehmeyer (1998):

Self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one’s strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in our society. (p. 2)
Argan, Blanchard, and Wehmeyer (2000) conducted a study using the self-determination learning model of instruction. In this study they used a Global Assessment Scale to measure the effects of the self-determination learning model of instruction on the self-determination skills of students with significant cognitive disabilities. A positive effect was predicted. Participants in the study consisted of 7 females and 12 males who had received support services to promote self-determination. These students were given a self-determination learning model of instruction in different settings where they identified target behaviors. Six teachers and eight paraprofessionals collected data on a regular basis and completed a Goal Attainment Scale for each student. The study revealed that 89% of the students achieved their personal goals. The model was found to be effective for students with learning disabilities.

**Self-Determination Theory**

According to Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ryan and Deci, 2000; and Deci and Ryan, 2002, self-determination theory (SDT) is a macro-theory of human motivation that investigates human growth tendencies for self-motivation and personality integration. The SDT suggests that an individual’s intrinsic motivation is driven by autonomy, competence and relatedness. Autonomy refers to an individual’s belief that they are in control (feeling ownership), competence refers to feeling effective and relatedness refers to feeling close and connected to other individuals. In other words, within SDT, learning is a process that functions when an individual’s motivation is autonomous for engaging in learning activities, when they feel that they are competent in the activity being performed and feel that what they are doing is related to their own goals. Gronlick and Ryan (quoted in Deci and Ryan, 1985, p. 259) conducted a study with some social studies students. The researchers found that students who were externally motivated “were inferior to other groups on conceptual learning.” In the study, the participants (three different groups) were
asked to read an age-appropriate social studies passage under one of three conditions. One of the groups was informed that they would be tested and receive a grade. The second group was asked to read the passage and see what they could learn from it. Finally, the last group was only instructed to read the passage and was not given any other instructions. Groups one and two displayed higher rote recall than group three. The students in the third group did not learn facts; however, they gained a conceptual understanding of material that interested them.

According to Deci and Ryan (2000, 2008), and Ryan and Deci (2000), the SDT may be summarized as individuals experiencing one of two forms of motivation: autonomous or controlled. When they experience autonomous motivation, they feel a profound sense of choice. In contrast, when individuals experience controlled motivation, they feel obliged and driven by forces that transcend the self, such as managers or society in general. Usually, when individuals tend to feel they are granted choice and autonomy, their persistence and wellbeing improves according to self-determination theory, proposed by Deci and Ryan (2000, 2008), and Ryan and Deci (2000).

**Summary**

The literature shows that the numbers of students with LDs are entering post-secondary education at an increasing rate. LDs can be traced back to the early 1800s and it was only in the 1960s and 1970s when the U.S. federal legislation took an interest in the field. LD is not a single disorder; however, they often fall into three main categories: dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. Often, college students with a LD face a range of challenges and difficulties. However, students may receive accommodations and support services that will assist them in
succeeding in college. Title III of the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act make it possible for students with LDs to receive the assistance after students self-disclose their disability and needs. Students with LDs also use other strategies such as self-determination, metacognition, self-regulated skills and compensation strategies. The themes covered in this literature review are history of LD, challenges and difficulties students’ face, self-determination and other strategies students use to overcome obstacles, laws that protect students and afford them the right to accommodations and support services. After the examination of the literature, there is a need for future research on college students with LDs that should focus on examining and understanding their experiences as they navigate their way through college.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The number of students with learning disabilities (LD) attending colleges has steadily increased over the past two decades (Foley, 2006). However, the college completion rate for students with LD is 41%, compared to 52% of students without LD (Finch, 2014). Understanding the overall experiences and perceptions of college students with LDs is an important step in supporting students with LD in higher education. There may not be sufficient support within institutions of higher education for those students with LD who wish to pursue advanced education, thus the study will explore what it means to be a student with LD attending an institution of higher education. The significance and relevance of this study may assist postsecondary institutions to improve accommodations and programming within their own student disability office. According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), approximately 17% of students with LD receive accommodations and support at college, compared to 94% of high school students with LD (2014). Exploring the perceptions of students with LDs in higher education may help to understand the wide gap in students receiving services from high school to college.

The purpose of this study was to describe and better understand the experiences and self-determination of college students with LD at a university located in the south. As such, the research question was: How do upperclassmen college students with a learning disability describe their college learning experiences at a private university located in the Southeast United States? The research question guided the researcher in exploring the sense making of the participants in relation to their experiences and use of self-determination.
Chapter three will discuss the research methods that were used by the researcher in this study. The chapter is organized in the following order: research paradigm, research design, research tradition, role of researcher, research procedures and summary.

**Research Paradigm**

Qualitative research using an interpretivism paradigm offers the best approach for this study because it focuses on describing how individuals make sense of their lives in natural settings (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun; Linclon & Guba, 1985). Schwandt (1994) states that proponents of interpretivism emphasize the goal of understanding the “lived experiences” (Erlebnis) from the point of view of those who live it day to day (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). Interpretivism allows for the researcher and participants to make meaning of the research topic. They regularly interact with each other and accept the natural changes and meandering pathway that the research may take.

Researchers working under the interpretivism paradigm use the qualitative approach to the research problems and do not adhere to a single truth; instead, they look for patterns in the learning experiences derived from the actions of the research participants. Butin (2010) postulates that, “An interpretivist perspective does not attempt to adjudicate between competing truth claims in order to determine the one best answer, rather, interpretivism suggests that all one can do is accurately and thoroughly document the perspective being investigated” (Butin, 2010, p.60). Thus, the interpretivist paradigm was utilized to understand the experiences of college students with LDs as they navigate their way through college. The researcher served in an observant role while collecting data and an interpretive role during data analysis.
**Research Design**

Qualitative research allows for the examination of how individuals experience and understand a common phenomenon and how that understanding influences subsequent behavior (Creswell, 2009; Maxwell, 2005). The common phenomenon that the researcher studied was the phenomenon of being a student with a LD in higher education. Moreover, qualitative research allowed the researcher to gather information-rich data from participants (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), “qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail” (p. 13). The researcher sought to understand the experiences of college students with LDs as they navigated their way through higher education. Therefore, qualitative research was the best approach for this study because it allowed the researcher to understand the meaning of participants’ experiences through their own words.

**Research Tradition**

Qualitative research implementing an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was utilized for the study. Smith (2011) points out IPA is phenomenological in nature in that it plans to examine individuals’ experiences and their sense-making of those experiences. Also, the IPA approach is hermeneutical because it allows for the interpretation of the participants’ reflections and finally it is an ideographic undertaking because it warrants in-depth analysis of individual experiences. Smith, Larkin, & Flowers (2009) remind us that IPA is intended to assist a researcher in exploring “how people make sense of their major life experiences” (p. 1). Moreover, Smith et al. (2009) also point out the best-suited data collection for IPA research is one that encourages the participants to offer a “rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences” (p. 56). Smith et al. (2009) further point out that the best methods
to access these first-person accounts are in-depth interviews and the process of keeping a journal. The researcher wrote notes about the body language and gestures expressed by the participants. It was important to make notes because oftentimes the body language helped the researcher to make sense of how a participant was feeling. The lack of eye contact could not be captured through audio; therefore it was important for the researcher to make notes and later refer back to the notes to deduce that a participant was shy or uncomfortable. The IPA approach “offers insight into a particular perspective on a phenomenon” (Handley & Hutchinson, 2013, p.188). In this study, the participants shared the phenomena of being students with a learning disability navigating their way through college. Therefore, an IPA approach enabled the researcher to explore and better understand the experiences of college upperclassmen with LDs as they navigated their journey and investigate how their self-determination influenced their success in higher education.

Role of Researcher

Lincoln (2003) points out in qualitative studies, the researcher is considered to be an instrument of data. In other words, the data is transformed through this human instrument rather than through questionnaires or inventories. Therefore, the qualitative researcher needs to describe relevant aspects of self, which includes biases, assumptions, expectations, and experiences to qualify his or her ability to conduct the research (Greenbank, 2003). Moreover, Kline (2008) argues that researcher assumptions can be a product of literature review, their experiences with the phenomenon, their personal beliefs and biases. Kline (2008) concurs with Greenbank (2003) by arguing that researchers need to be clear to readers about their roles in the
study, including describing their assumptions and potential biases about the phenomenon in question and how they will be addressed throughout the study.

**Research Procedures**

**Participants**

Criterion sampling was used to select four students and the researcher looked for maximum variation of types of disability within the sample. Criterion sampling is when all cases meet some criterion that is useful for quality assurance in a study (Creswell, 2013). The criteria used to select participants for this proposed study was first time college students with a documented LD on file through counseling services, who had completed at least two semesters at Cusseta University (CU) and were at least 18 years old.

Smith and Osborn (2008) point out that there is no right answer to the question of the sample size and that it depends on the degree of commitment to the study level of analysis and reporting, the richness of the individual cases, and the constraints one is operating under. Therefore, the researcher selected four participants on a first come first served basis if all of the criteria were met. Maximum variation was not achieved because only four individuals replied to the Recruitment Flyer (Appendix A) and Recruitment Email (Appendix C) and they all were diagnosed with dyslexia and all classifications were not represented. The researcher sought a sample size of six; however, was unsuccessful because of insufficient responses from potential participants.
Recruitment and Access

The researcher began recruiting participants after Cusseta University’s and Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Boards (IRB) approved the proposed study’s ‘Application for IRB Approval’ (Appendix H). The researcher recruited potential participants for the study at a small private university in the South. Accommodations were offered through The Counseling Office, which is part of the Division of Student Affairs at CU. Therefore, the researcher secured permission from the Vice President of Students Affairs (Attachment B). Also, the researcher asked the Counseling Office (specifically, the counselor who works with the students with LDs) to forward a recruitment email (Appendix C) and recruitment flyer (Appendix A) to all 19 upperclassmen with a learning disability who were registered with the Counseling Office. The flyers contained information about the purpose of the study, participant criteria, and compensation for participant’s time (a $20 Cusseta University gift card/certificate for each participant). The gift cards were compensation for participants’ transportation and time spent in the interviews. Interested students were asked to call the researcher for more information.

Protection of Human Subjects

The study included human participants and must be reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Cusseta University and Northeastern University. The IRBs ensure that researchers comply with human subject research in accordance with all federal, institutional, and ethical guidelines. The researcher received an IRB Approval Letter from Northeastern University (Appendix H) and sent the approval letter to Cusseta University, along with Cusseta University’s IRB application. Finally, the researcher received an IRB Approval Letter from Cusseta University (Appendix I).
The researcher completed the “Protecting Human Research Participants” training through the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research (Appendix K). The researcher incorporated protections to ensure the safety of the participants. It is important to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants in the study (Creswell, 2012). The participants were informed of their rights of justice, autonomy and beneficence as outlined in the Belmont Report (1979). Additionally, the participants were reminded that their participation in the study was voluntary and they have the right to withdraw from the study without any penalties. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality and identity in all transcribed interviews, audio-recordings, interview transcriptions, and other documents. All the documents remain in the researcher’s sole possession in a locked file cabinet and password protected computer.

**Informed Consent**

At the first face-to-face meeting with the selected participants, Informed Consent Forms (Appendix D and E) was given to individuals and they were asked to read their copy of the form along with the researcher. After the participants read the forms, the researcher reviewed the Informed Consent Forms (Appendix D and Appendix E) and asked if there were any questions. Additionally, the participants were provided with written and verbal explanations of the goals of the study using clear and concise language. The researcher assured that the participants knew when they signed the form, they were agreeing to be involved in a study and they had the right to withdraw at any time from the study.
Data Collection

The process in which a researcher identifies and selects individuals for a study, obtaining informed consent and gathering information by asking individuals questions is called data collection (Creswell, 2012). It is necessary and important to obtain accurate and detailed data for a research study.

The researcher received telephone calls as directed in the recruitment email and flyer from four potential participants. Each potential participant was asked if the telephone call could be audio recorded and all four individuals declined to have the telephone conversation recorded. The researcher did not record the telephone conversations; however, interviewed the potential participants using the Initial Telephone Interview Protocol (Appendix D) to determine their eligibility. The researcher listened carefully to the potential participants and recorded the answers in a journal. Two of the interviews were held for 30 minutes and two took 45 minutes because the individuals had numerous questions. Each potential participant was told at the end of the interview if they were selected or not. All four individuals were eligible and appointments were scheduled based on their availability.

The researcher followed the Interview Protocol (Appendix G) when she met with participants. Additional data collection by the researcher took place by conducting two face-to-face, in-depth semi-structured interviews that lasted from 45 – 60 minutes each.

Permission was obtained to audio record the interview session beginning with the review of the Informed Consent form. The interviews were conducted on the campus of CU in a private office. The interviews were conducted in person because it was important to observe body language and non-verbal language in the data collection. The researcher wrote notes about the participants’ non-verbal expressions and body language in a journal to help her better understand
each participant. The researcher discussed the informed consent process, confidentiality, and risks at the first meeting just prior to the interview. Smith and Osborn (2008) articulate that semi-structured interviews generally last for a considerable amount of time and can become intense and involved, depending on the particular topic. Moreover, Rubin and Rubin (2012) posit, in a semi-structured interview, the researcher has a certain topic to learn about, prepares questions in advance, and plans to ask follow-up questions. The researcher used semi-structured interviews because it is open, allowing new ideas to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says. Therefore, the researcher asked the participants open-ended questions about their experiences and self-determination and recorded the responses. The researcher received permission from the participants to use a digital recorder to ensure the accuracy of their responses. The researcher had rev.com to transcribe the interviews and sign a Transcriber Confidentiality Statement (Appendix J). Upon completion of the transcribed interviews, the researcher allowed the participants to read the transcript for accuracy. However, the researcher read the transcript to one of the participants because reading disability was involved. A third interview was scheduled and the researcher provided a copy of the transcript to the participant to verify the information from the interviewee. This process is called member checking and it will help with the trustworthiness of the study.

**Data Storage**

The digital recordings, transcripts, informed consent forms and researchers’ notes were transcribed and stored in a fire proof filing cabinet under lock and key off the campus of CU at the researcher’s residence. Additionally, there were backup copies of the data stored on DVDs and they also were filed in the fireproof filing cabinet. The student researcher and the advisor
are the only individuals with access to the data, which is locked in a filing cabinet. The recordings, notes and DVDs will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study; however, all data on the computer was transferred to a jump drive. Thus, the data on the computer was destroyed immediately. All participants’ names were removed from all documents and replaced with a pseudonym for confidentiality.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis consists of “taking the data apart to determine individual responses and then “putting it together” to summarize it (Creswell, 2012, p.10). The process of analyzing and interpreting data is when a researcher draw conclusions about it; presents it in figures, pictures and tables to summarize it and explain his/her findings in a written conclusion (Creswell, 2012).

Transcribed interviews were analyzed manually and data was analyzed using an inductive and iterative process (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The analysis process began by the researcher following the steps by Smith et al (2009). First the researcher carefully read and re-read the data. The researcher then made notes of anything of interest that included descriptive comments and phrases. The next step was when the researcher started to work closely with initial notes to develop emergent themes. Upon the completion of studying the notes, the researcher completed a search for theme connections. The researcher clustered similar themes and created a name describing the whole (superordinate theme). Finally, the researcher conducted a cross-case analysis in which she looked for similarities, differences, identified connections and renamed themes for a greater understanding of the data.

The researcher continued to analyze, synthesize, and reduce the data by refining and reducing those codes to reflect the overarching themes capturing the phenomenon of the college
students with LDs. The researcher completed the coding manually and the researcher completed a round of coding analysis after each interview to see patterns early on.

**Trustworthiness**

The aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry is to support the argument that the inquiry’s findings are “worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Hunt (2011) argues that a researcher can establish trustworthiness and ensure the voices of participants are present in the study by including participants in the data analysis or review process. The researcher completed a process called “member checking” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking is primarily used in qualitative inquiry methodology and is defined as a quality control process by which a researcher seeks to improve the accuracy, credibility and validity of what has been recorded during a research interview (Byrne, 2001; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were permitted to review the transcripts and the analysis of the transcripts at the end of the study. They were allowed to add new thoughts and clarify any thoughts; however, none of the participants added nor clarified any of the information and were in agreement with the transcripts and analyses.

Reflexivity, or self-reflection, on the part of the researcher was another procedure used to establish trustworthiness. This often occurs in the form of a reflexive journal in which the researcher writes about their “experiences, reactions, and emerging awareness of any assumptions or biases that come to the fore” (Morrow, 2005, p. 254). The researcher kept a journal by writing her observations during the interviews and reflections after each interview. The researcher wrote reflective memos after each interview to document how she made sense of what the participants said about their experiences.
Confidentiality

The researcher sent the audio recorded interview to an outside transcribing service (rev.com) after each session and asked that a client non-disclosure agreement for each transcription be provided. Pseudonyms (Kaylee, Pedro, Alexandria and Nevaeh) were used to keep participants’ name and the name of the institution (Cusseta University) confidential.

Limitations

Areas of limitations included: finding available and willing students to participate in the study because of the small population and maintaining complete anonymity for these students. Only four participants volunteered for the study and maximum variation was not achieved because all of the participants had a diagnosis of dyslexia and all of the classifications were not represented. The role of the researcher included that of an observer, and data collector. However, each week, the researcher called and asked the Counselor to resend the recruitment email and flyer to the potential participants. This process took place for eight weeks after four potential participants came forward. Throughout the interview and research process, the researcher maintained a neutral role in relationship to the participants.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to describe and better understand the experiences and self-determination of college students with LDs at a university located in the south. The researcher used criterion sampling (Creswell, 2013) to select the participants and Deci and Ryan’s Self-Determination theory (SDT) served as the conceptual framework for this study. SDT is a macro-theory of human motivation and personality that focuses on the degree to which an individual’s behavior is self-motivated and self-determined (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2002). The researcher began the recruitment process by contacting the counseling office at
the site institution. The researcher requested assistance from the counselor who works with the students with disabilities and confirmed that they were willing to take part in the research process. Documentation of approval of the study, as well as information about the purpose and design of the study was provided to the counseling office. This office acted as a gatekeeper in the study, as they assisted with recruitment and provided access to potential participants (Creswell, 2012). Specifically, they emailed fliers and sent a recruitment email to the students with LDs. Their participation and role as gatekeeper was important, because information about students with disabilities should be held in strict confidence (Johl & Renganathan, 2010).
CHAPTER 4: Findings and Analysis

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 have made it possible for students with learning disabilities LDs to enroll in colleges and universities (Hadley, 2007). Subsequently, institutions of higher education must be prepared to effectively educate students with LDs because of the increasing numbers of these students on college and university campuses. The purpose of this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was to better understand the experiences of college students with learning disabilities (LDs) and how they made sense of this experience.

Chapter four describes and analyzes the qualitative data gathered for this study. The chapter restates the research question; introduces the participants, followed by a discussion of the nested themes that emerged from the superordinate themes. The chapter concludes with a summary of the data and a preview of chapter five. The goal throughout the study was to give voice and make sense of the experiences of upperclassmen with learning disabilities as they matriculate at a private university located in the south. The university has an enrollment of approximately 3,000 students that are coeducational, racially, ethnically and religiously diverse.

Research Question

How do upperclassmen college students with a learning disability describe their college learning experiences at a private university located in the Southeast United States?
Meet the Participants

There were four participants who ranged in age from 18 – 21. Two of the participants were sophomores and two were seniors. The only male participant and one female are majoring in animal science. One of the seniors is majoring in engineering and the other one is majoring in sociology.

Kaylee is an anxious 21-year-old female who grew up in Texas. She was diagnosed with dyslexia in elementary school and is currently a senior engineering major at Cusseta University. Kaylee’s goal is to obtain her Ph.D. in biomedical engineering and ultimately become an astronaut. Kaylee nervously used her fingers to softly tap the table and run her hands through her shoulder length hair throughout the interview.

Pedro is a 19-year-old outspoken young male who was born and raised in Michigan. He always struggled with his academics and high school and did not understand why. It was only when Pedro graduated from high school that he was tested and received a diagnosis of dyslexia. Pedro is a sophomore majoring in animal science at Cusseta University. His ultimate goal is to become a veterinarian. Pedro was eager to talk and made good eye contact during the interview; however, he was restless and impatient at times. Often times, he stood up to stretch.

Alexandria is a soft-spoken and shy female. Oftentimes, Alexandria used her hands and lacked good eye contact when she spoke. Alexandria’s dream always was to attend Cusseta University and receive her degree. She is currently enrolled at Cusseta University as a sophomore majoring in animal science. Alexandria was diagnosed as being dyslexic in elementary school and is now 19 years old.

Nevaeh is a 21 year old Californian. Currently, Nevaeh is a senior enrolled at Cusseta University majoring in sociology. Diagnosed as having dyslexia in high school, she quickly
recognized that her younger brother who was in elementary school also was dyslexic. Nevaeh became her brother’s advocate and played a significant role in having him tested and diagnosed. Nevaeh exhibited a range of emotions throughout the interview. At times, she fought back tears when she talked about her brother and at times she seemed sad and she often looked down when she spoke.

**Themes**

The analyses of the data yielded six superordinate themes and four corresponding nested themes. The superordinate themes and their nested themes were: (1) concealing information about learning disability (1.1 fear of others knowing, 1.2 concerned about being labeled), (2) positive beliefs about oneself (3) reluctantly embracing accommodations (3.1. the embracement of independence) (4) facing difficulties (4.1 resilience as a way of making a comeback) (5) empowering oneself to meet goals, and (6) interactions with professors.

**Concealing Information About Learning Disability**

All of the participants articulated that they kept the information about their learning disability to themselves upon finding out in high school. However, information about their learning disability (LD) was revealed in order for them to receive accommodations. Three of the participants admitted that their parents forced them to receive accommodations in high school. All four of the participants indicated they reluctantly applied for accommodations in college.

**Fear of others knowing.** The four participants expressed that, at one point in time or another, they were afraid to tell their college friends about their learning disability. Three of the
four participants felt that they would lose their friends or be treated differently if the information about their learning was made known. Kaylee had the following to say:

I still kind of get picked on even now in college, where’s it’s like, if I’m writing an email or something, it’s not going to be perfectly grammar because it’s just how my brain works. Even then, it’s certain stuff, I might not be able to pronounce a word exactly like how everybody else pronounces it. They’d be like “Don’t you know how to say that?” it’s like, no I don’t. It’s just the way it came out.

Alexandria had the following to say about the fear of others knowing: “I was afraid my friends wouldn’t want to be my friends anymore and my teachers would be like, ugh, that’s why. I didn’t want them to look at me any differently”.

Pedro had the following to say about the fear of others knowing:

Nobody outside of my teachers really knows I have a learning disability. I am afraid that I may be treated like an outsider if my friends knew. So I just don’t want to take the chance of losing my friends or girlfriend by letting them know about my learning disability.

**Concerned about being labeled.**

Stigmatization was another theme that recurred in the study. The participants shared how they felt once they were diagnosed with a learning disability. Kaylee felt that people would label her as weird and Nevaeh felt she would get stuck with the label of stupid. Kaylee shared: “Uh, I’m kind of weird. I’m not up to par with my peers”. Nevaeh articulated: “I felt really stupid. It’s a harsh word, but I felt like I was behind in my classes and that…I don’t know. I just didn’t feel…it wasn’t good”. The two others participants, Pedro and Alexandria felt that they
would be labeled retarded and abnormal respectively. Pedro articulated: “I was shocked and thought I was retarded”. Alexandria shared: “I kind of thought something was wrong with me and like I wasn’t normal”.

**Positive Beliefs About Oneself**

The theme of self-concept recurred among all of the participants. Kaylee displayed positive self-worth by sharing the following:

I plan to attend grad school to obtain a master’s degree in biophysics engineering, Ph.D. in biomedical engineering, and then become an astronaut, and help work on the next man mission to Mars or to what other planet they want to go to. I applied for grad schools, got my recommendations from my professors, and I also had interviews with multiple Fortune 500 companies in the past year, and I finally decided on which company I was going to work for that pays for grad school, that is right down the street from the university that I wanted to attend.

Pedro showed his self-worth: “My initial high school counselor told me that my grades weren’t good enough and I would have to go to a community college. I am now a sophomore at the college of my choice”. More positive self-worth was displayed when Alexandria articulated:

I thought I was somebody that was not normal and couldn’t keep up and wasn’t smart. I was embarrassed to tell anyone about my learning disability. When I got help with my learning disability, I started making A’s, I kind of was like…that’s when I grew out of being ashamed, because I was like I can do it, I just need help.

Pedro displayed a good self-image when he articulated: “I am not going to fail, because everybody back home is bragging about me”. Alexandria displayed her positive self-image when she articulated:
Now that first semester is over, I want to maintain my 4.0 grade point average. That is a new goal. Before I just had to make good grades, but I want to maintain that grade point average. I want to graduate early because I know I can do it.

Kaylee shared additional reflections demonstrating self-imagine: “Uh, I thought that I was kind of weird. I didn’t want anyone to know about my learning disability. I was on a second grade reading level when I entered high school. Now I have a 3.4 GPA”.

Nevaeh also exhibited self-esteem when she shared her story:

I tried out for Rave Review, which is a modeling thing, and you had to get up and model in front of students who came. I prayed and I got up there and I walked, I did my two poses, and I made it. They called me back and I made it. I can become a model”.

It was noted that all of the participants had a positive self-concept about them and felt good; however, the positivity was not always there and it gradually came with time. Alexandria recalled: “When I got help with my learning disability, I started making A’s, I kind of was like… that’s when I grew out of the being ashamed, because I was like I can do it, I just need help”.

**Reluctantly Embracing Accommodations**

The use of accommodations was the third superordinate theme. The three female participants admitted that they did not want to use the accommodations in high school at first; however, they were beneficial once they used them. Pedro, the only male participant did not use accommodations in high school because he was 17 years old when he was diagnosed with his LD. The most common accommodations used by them were extended time for exams and
having a different version of the exam from classmates. Nevaeh’s primary LD is dyslexia; however, she also suffers from dysgraphia, which is a LD that affects writing abilities. It can present itself as difficulties with spelling, poor handwriting and trouble putting thoughts on paper. Nevaeh recalled:

I had different versions of the test in high school, so it could be broken down easier for me. Some of my tests were even given verbal because I can understand better if I’m speaking it. I know what I’m saying; I think that’s kind of how I mainly remembered.

The participants were asked if they used accommodations in college and all except Kaylee used accommodations in college. Kaylee is registered to receive accommodation; however, she indicated that she felt she did not need them after high school. Pedro, Alexandria, and Nevaeh indicated that they get extended time when they have exams. Pedro audio records his lectures while Alexandria has a reader and Nevaeh sits in front of the class. It was a consensus that their accommodations were useful. Alexandria indicated that she received a 4.0 grade point average (GPA) last semester and Kaylee articulated that she has a 3.4 GPA. Although Nevaeh does not receive accommodations she has maintained a 3.2 GPA. Pedro articulated that his GPA was not great; however, his accommodations were good and it was his fault that he was not taking full advantage of them. The three participants receiving the accommodations indicated that it was very easy to register for and receive them. It was noted that the three female participants who received accommodations in high school are currently academically successful. Pedro did not use accommodations in high school and academically he is not as successful as the other three in college.

Although all of the participants had dyslexia; some experienced it differently and studied differently. Kaylee experiences problems in spelling. She usually has to take a small section of
information, write it down and go back try to learn it. Alexandria often has reading comprehensive problems and she makes note cards and color code them. Pedro and Neveah remember things best if they verbally read something aloud several times. Moreover, Pedro said studying the night before the exam; whereas, Neveah studies a little each night.

**Need to Embrace Independence to Seek Accommodations**

Typically, high school students with LDs have depended upon their parents to advocate on their behalf. College students with LDs must advocate for themselves at a university. Three of the four participants in the present study admitted that they did not know what a LD was and most definitely did not know what self-advocacy was because their parents made sure that they received everything academically to help them. Nevaeh recalled:

I registered for accommodations because I knew my mom wasn’t going to be here to help me. Having this learning disability it’s not easiest and I get frustrated a lot. I knew I had to help myself by registering for accommodations.

Pedro said “I made sure that I registered to receive accommodations because I didn’t receive them in high school and I’m at a disadvantage and need a lot of help”. Alexandria’s comments were: “I am a young adult and it is my responsibility to pursue everything that will help me to successfully graduate from college, including using accommodations”.

**Facing Difficulties**

Adversity was a superordinate theme that emerged. Kaylee recalled: “I had a second grade reading level when I entered high school”. Pedro remembered: “My initial high school
counselor told me that my grades weren’t good enough and I would have to go to a community college”. Nevaeh shared the following:

Me and one of my best friends from back home both got diagnosed at the same time and throughout elementary and middle school we got teased so much because we had to leave the class to go take our test. It was hard. She would cry every day and I would cry, too.

Alexandria tearfully, remembered:

Initially I thought I was somebody that just couldn’t learn, because I was young so I just was like I was not smart enough in my eyes. I felt that I couldn’t keep up with the normal average kids. I was ashamed and sad because I thought I was somebody that was not normal and couldn’t keep up and wasn’t smart.

**Resilience as a Way of Making a Comeback**

Although the four participants experienced some type of adversity, they found a way to recover from their misfortunes. Kaylee articulated: “I was able to jump from a second grade reading level in high school to having a 3.4 GPA in college by working hard and using my accommodations”.

Pedro shared his story:

My initial high school counselor told me that my grades weren’t good enough and I would have to go to a community college and then I got a new counselor and he encouraged me to attend a regular college. I am a sophomore attending a private four year college of my choice because of my determination and the encouragement my new counselor gave.

Nevaeh shared her story of resilience:
I felt dumb because my friends constantly made fun of me in high school because of my grades and I thought that I was stupid. I stopped feeling sorry for myself and started studying harder. Now I am a senior college student with a 3.2 GPA.

Alexandria articulated:

I felt ashamed because I fell a grade behind my classmates in high school. When I became a freshman in college, I studied harder, socialized less and used my accommodations more. I am now a sophomore college student with a GPA of 4.0.

**Empowering Oneself to Meet Goals**

Pedro has set a goal of becoming a veterinarian and he plans to accomplish his goal by passing all of his classes. Kaylee articulated, “I want to graduate from college, get a master’s degree in biophysics engineering, and then get my Ph.D. in biomedical engineering, and then become an astronaut”. When Kaylee was asked what steps she has taken to meet her goals and she replied “I have taken the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) and gotten my recommendations from my professors”. Alexandria articulated:

Well, now that first semester is over, I want to maintain my 4.0 GPA. That is a new goal. Before I just had to make good grades, but I want to maintain that GPA. I want to graduate early and attend veterinary school.

Alexandria was asked how she was going to achieve her goal:

One, picking a major that will put me on that track. Two, I am making good relationships with the dean and directors of everything and asking questions, meeting people and making sure they know my face, name and know that I have goals. I also plan on doing well on all of my assignments, no matter what.
Nevaeh’s goal: “My goal is to go to graduate school and obtain a master’s degree in social work. I have what it takes to become successful in my field. Giving up is not an option”. The researcher reviewed the transcripts several times to try and make sense of the participants’ thoughts, individually and collectively. It became apparent that all the participants had the desire to succeed and they were taking the necessary steps to make success happen for them.

**Interactions with Professors**

The participants were asked about their experiences with their professors. Most of the participants in this study had positive things to say about their professors. However, Nevaeh talked about a negative encounter she had with one of her professors:

> With a certain professor, he was very picky about it and as much as I tried to spell, I just couldn't spell right, so he would mark me down every time for spelling which would make me fail my test. I knew the information but he would mark so harsh on spelling. He was like, "You should just know this x, y, and z." Ms. Lun, she told me to talk to him, I talked to him, talked to him and then when she was possibly going to send him an email which I told him that, he then accommodated it, almost in a sense that it came off that he thought I was lying about my accommodations and that I was just trying to get over. So it was all bad.

On a more positive note Nevaeh articulated:

> Knowing that my professors, they help me and they work with me and they understand my learning disability. My social work professor pulled me to the side and she was the first person to ever tell me like, it’s okay to talk about my disability. She told me not to
be ashamed of it and to be proud of it. She told me that it’s okay because everybody have something wrong with them. She also told me that I am at the top percentage of her class when it comes to writing papers. When she told me that, it almost sunk in, in a sense to me it was like, okay, I guess I am doing good. I got this.

When asked about her experiences with her professors, Kaylee articulated: “They're pretty good for the most part, and it does help that multiple professors are the exact same professors that I have later on down the road”. When asked about the interactions with his professors, Pedro articulated:

- Getting the extra help that I need when I really need it. Like when I can't turn to my peers for some help, or they don't have all the answer so I will go to my professor.
- Everyone is very pleasant, and everyone wants you to succeed. But they hold you accountable to succeed.

Alexandria shared her interaction with her animal science professor:

- My best experience would be with Dr. B, my animal science professor. I was actually kind of scared of her at first because she's very stern and strict and so I was kind of scared, but I met with her and talked about accommodations and everything and she assured me that she was there to help me, too, so I kind of, I'm not scared of her as much anymore. That was warming to know that she wants me to succeed and so she needs me to let her know how and so we talked about accommodations and everything and so, yeah.

Alexandria also shared a negative interaction with her philosophy professor:

- A bad experience would be with my philosophy teacher and he just wasn't very welcoming so I haven't said anything about accommodations to him because I don't want
him getting mad, but he got mad at me for emailing him about a textbook, so he's not very warming, so I don't even, I don't know. I'm trying to get out of that class. Looking back over the transcripts and written notes, the researcher made sense of the participants’ experiences with their professors. The participants all had different experiences (good and bad) with their professors. However, all of the participants consciously or unconsciously knew they had rights and the professors had an obligation to them.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of college students with learning disabilities at a private university located in the Southeast United States and how they made sense of these experiences. A careful review and analysis of the data collected yielded insight into what the participants experienced, and how they made sense of their navigation through college. The researcher found six superordinate themes and four nested themes. The superordinate themes were concealing information about their learning disability, positive beliefs about oneself, reluctantly embracing accommodations, facing difficulties, empowering oneself to meet goals, and interactions with professors. Fear of others knowing, concerned about being labeled, the embracement of independence and resilience as a way of making a comeback were the nested themes.

The participants articulated they were apprehensive about revealing their disabilities to others. However, they all understood that they had to self-advocate and self-disclose the information about their learning disability to the Disability Coordinator in order to receive accommodations. They all reluctantly registered to receive their accommodations and they perceived being successful in the classroom was because of them. However, two of the four
participants decided to keep their LD from their friends in fear of being labeled or stigmatized; the other two participants said that their friends tried to help them in any way they could and were very supportive of them.

The participants perceived that they had to work harder than their peers to be successful; however, they did not mind the hard work because they really had a desire to meet their goals. Even though the participants faced some difficulties, they always used resilience as a comeback and in the process they perceived themselves as having good self-worth, good self-esteem and good self-image. Ultimately, the participants wanted to be seen as being no different from the other students.

The participants perceived that, in general, they had good interactions with their professors because they honored and respected their accommodations. They also perceived that their professors showed concerned and really wanted to help them become successful. However, one of the participants perceived one of her professors as uncaring and intimidating; therefore, she did not ask for accommodations in his class. Chapter five will include a discussion of the findings and implication for practice a
Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice

The purpose of this research study was to better understand the educational experiences of four college students who had a learning disability (LD) and how self-determination played a part in their success. The researcher utilized interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore the participants’ sense-making of the phenomena they had experienced.

A learning disability is often referred to as “the invisible handicap” because often times there are no visible indications of a problem. Even though there are more students with learning disabilities attending postsecondary education today, these students still face some of the same difficulties in college such as study skills, academic skills, and self-esteem as they did in high school (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). Longo (1988) posits that this population “poses the greatest challenge to higher education’s ability to accept and adapt to the diversity than any population accommodated thus far” (p. 10).

Generally, college students with a learning disability (LD) are more vulnerable to academic stress and failure than students without a LD (Cosden & McNamara, 1997). Nevertheless, there are a great number of students with LDs on college campuses (Henderson, 1995). Moreover, the number of students with LD entering post-secondary education is increasing each year (Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004). Given that there is an increase of this population enrolling in colleges, the self-determination theory provided a lens through which to examine the participants’ experiences because it allowed for a theoretical examination of autonomy, relatedness, and competency as determinants of motivation. There were six themes that emerged through an analysis of the data: (1) concealing information (2) self-concept (3) accommodations, (4) adversity, (5) self-determination, and interactions with professors. Interpretative phenomenological analysis research aims to go a little further than description of
the participants’ experiences. Therefore, the researcher kept a journal and wrote reflective notes after each interview to document how she made sense of what the participants said about their experiences. The researcher felt that she engaged in the double hermeneutic process of IPA by reflecting upon written journal notes, reading the transcripts and listening to the recordings several times. This process required her to interpret each participant’s sense-making with the goal of understanding the participants’ experiences.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the findings related to each superordinate theme and its position within the current literature and the theoretical framework. The researcher then discusses the implications of the findings in the practical setting with a focus on enhancing the college experiences for students with learning disabilities. Finally, this chapter concludes with recommendations for future research on the experiences of students with learning disabilities.

Themes

Concealing Their Disability to Avoid Being Perceived as Being Different

Participants in this study admitted that they concealed the fact that they had a learning disability either in high school or college or in some cases both. They felt they would be treated differently or stigmatized as being stupid, retarded, abnormal or weird. One of the participants indicated that she felt her professors would think she couldn’t do the assignments. The literature suggests being stigmatized is one of varied reasons students choose not to disclosure their LDs (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). Individuals are stigmatized when they receive differential treatment based on others’ perceptions (Barga, 1996). It was Goffman, 1963 who posited people develop stigma theories to explain and account for a labeled individual’s inferiority. Research conducted by May and Stone (2010) revealed that students with LDs felt peers would view their intellectual
abilities as being below average. Denhart (2008) points out students with LDs may fear faculty will perceive them as being incapable of the coursework load.

The researcher sensed that the participants were grateful because they had the option to conceal their non-visual disability in college. However, their desire to succeed outweighed their fear of being stigmatized. Some of the participants told their friends about their LD and found them to be helpful and were not treated different.

**Participants Had a Strong Sense of Self-concept Despite Having a Learning Disability**

Literature denotes and some scholars agree that self-concept is the "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg 1979, p. 7). Often times, individuals tend to value themselves as they are valued by significant others (Hayman, 1990). Self-Concept as defined by Rosenberg (1979) is "the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (p. 7). Some of the successes and failures that individuals experience in their life are sometimes related to the ways that they have learned to view themselves and their relationships with others (Purkey, 1988). The participants in this study displayed positive self-worth, self-image, and self-esteem. However, the participants articulated that it took time for them to develop a positive self-concept. Sincero (2012) reminds us individuals are not born with self-concept; however, over time and with growth it is developed.

Alexandria thought she was abnormal and not smart; however, she started feeling good about herself during her freshman year because she was making A’s because she was using accommodations. Nevaeh felt stupid and didn’t want anyone to find out about her disability. She started feeling good about herself when she participated in a model show in her junior year.
During the interview process the participants came across as confident and proud of how far they have come thus far. The researcher recalled how Kaylee stated that she thought that she was weird when she first was diagnosed with a LD because she entered high school reading on a second grade level. However, she now is a college senior with a 3.4 GPA and feels she can be successful despite having a learning disability. His high school counselor told Pedro that his grades were not good enough and should go to a community college. Pedro is now a sophomore at the college of his choice and feels confident and determined to succeed despite having a learning disability and being told that he could not achieve his goals. The participants often referred back to their years spent in high school experiencing all the negativity about their LDs. It was quite evident that they matured and valued themselves and now that they are in college they care less about what others think about them.

Participants Were Reluctant to Accept Support, but Eventually Embraced It

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires colleges and universities to provide reasonable accommodations to students with LDs. All of the participants in this study used accommodations in high school and/or college. Strichart and Mangrum (1985) remind us that practically all college students with a LD require some remedial services or accommodations. Students have to self-advocate for their accommodations. Self-advocacy means that the student understands his/her disability, is as aware of the strengths as of the weaknesses resulting from the functional limitation imposed by the disability, and is able to articulate reasonable need for academic or physical accommodations” (Hartman, 1993, p. 40). Under both Section 504 and the ADA, students have the burden to disclose their disability to university officials (Madaus, 2005). Neither parents nor guidance counselors are making sure
that accommodations are taken care of while the students are in college (English, Smith and Vasek, 2002). Section 504 prohibits personnel in universities from making inquiries about students’ disability status (Vogel, 2001). Students are responsible for clarifying the need for classroom accommodations to instructors after they have provided the necessary documentation referencing disability to the support service office for disabilities (Lynch & Gussel, 1996).

Purcell (1993) argues that disclosure and self-advocacy skills are important to presenting the need for accommodations at the college level. Extended time for exams was the most common accommodations used by the participants in this study. Tape recording the lecture was an accommodation used frequently by one of the participant in this study. It was evident that the accommodations played a great part in the participants’ success because three of the four were honored students and they pointed out that it was not hard to sign up for their accommodations.

Support services and accommodations may range from compliance programs that meet the minimum requirements established by law to comprehensive programs that offer a high degree of structure, quality and support (Troiano, 1999; Vogel, 1993). Although progress has been made regarding the acknowledgement of students with LDs at many colleges and universities, some continue to offer minimal assistance and require students with LDs to fit within the traditional mold of the institution (Bursuck, Rose, Cowen, and Yahaya, 1989). Cusseta University (CU) does not have an Office of Disability Services; the students are serviced through a Disability Coordinator who also serves as a Counselor to the general population. Therefore, CU can only provide the minimal required by law. Larger colleges and universities can provide a more comprehensive and elaborate program for their students. It was apparent that the participants wished CU had more accommodations because some of them kept referring to the accommodations they used in high school and how they missed them.
Participants Experienced Greater Adversity Prior to the Diagnosis of Learning Disability

Adversity was experienced by all of the participants. Adversity may occur when an individual experiences a threat to satisfying basic human needs that made include physical safety, sense of self-worth, efficacy, and belonging to a positive social network (Sandler, 2001). One of the participants in this study felt she wasn’t smart enough and another admitted that she entered high school reading on a second grade level. Alexandria articulated: “I thought I couldn’t learn because of my disability. Later in college I had that ah-ha moment of like, I’m smart, and it’s not what I thought it was”. Despite the perceived obstacles, Alexandria maintained a 4.0 grade point average (GPA). Alexandria was often hard on herself and sometimes felt sad about her learning disability. However, as time went by she was able to overcome the feeling by completing her assignments two weeks before the due date. Alexandria accepted the fact that she was smart but had to work harder than her peers to become successful. Kaylee demonstrated adversity and resilience when she articulated: “I had a second grade reading level when I entered high school. Now I have a 3.4 GPA.” Kaylee felt that she was weird and different from her peers. However, as she matured she overcame the feeling by realizing she was smart but learned differently from her peers. Resiliency is the ability to overcome adversity (Zimmerman and Arunkumar, 1994) or “those factors and processes that interrupt the trajectory from risk to problem behavior or psychopathology and thereby result in adaptive outcomes even in the presence of challenging and threatening circumstances” (p. 4).

Raskind and Goldberg (2003) suggest that some college students with learning disabilities show great perseverance and keep pursuing their goals despite difficulties and obstacles. These college students may describe themselves as “I am not a quitter”, and “I never give up”. Nevaeh admitted that having a learning disability is sometimes challenging in her
academics. One day Nevaeh’s boyfriend reminded her that things could always be worse and that she should take life as a journey. Nevaeh articulated that when she had bad days, she pushes herself and get through it. Pedro often spent time studying while his friends were having a good time. Pedro articulated: “I am not going to fail, because everybody back home is bragging about me”. Moreover, the students may seldom give up on a goal; but, they may change the way they go about achieving it, thereby improving their chances for success (Raskind & Goldberg, 2003). All of the participants in this study seem to be determined and did not give up easily.

However, it was not always easy for these participants to be as successful as they are today because they had to work harder than their peers. The endurance of pain was evident as one of the participants tearfully told her story.

Participants Met Goals and How it Relates to Self-Determination

The participants wanted to succeed by empowering themselves to meet goals. Self-determination emerged as a theme as the participants told their stories. Self-determination consists of skills, knowledge and beliefs that empower an individual to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, and autonomous behavior (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998). The Self-Determination Theory helped the researcher to make sense of the participants’ intrinsic motivation as they told their stories about meeting their goals. According to Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ryan and Deci, 2000; and Deci and Ryan, 2002, self-determination theory (SDT) is a macro-theory of human motivation that investigates human growth tendencies for self-motivation and personality integration. The SDT suggests that an individual’s intrinsic motivation is driven by autonomy, competence and relatedness. Autonomy refers to an
individual’s belief that they are in control (feeling ownership), competence refers to feeling effective and relatedness refers to feeling close and connected to other individuals.

Nevaeh demonstrated autonomy when she articulated that having a learning disability was not the easiest thing; however she knew that registering for accommodations was in her best interest. Nevaeh has a goal to go to graduate school to obtain a master’s degree in Social Work and she is preparing to be successful by using all the accommodations afforded to her. Pedro felt that he was in control because he did whatever he had to do in order to succeed. One of Pedro’s goals is to become a veterinarian and he is studying harder to make good grades in all of his classes in order to become successful. Kaylee displayed competence when she registered to receive accommodations in case she needed them. Kaylee wants to receive her master’s and Ph.D. degrees and then become an astronaut. Kaylee has taken the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) and obtained letters of recommendations from all of her professors. Kaylee knows in order to be successful in attaining her goals, she has to plan ahead and take the necessary steps that are required. Alexandria displayed competence because she realized that she was a young adult and it was her responsibility to pursue everything that would help her to successfully graduate from college, which included using accommodations to help her maintain her 4.0 GPA. Alexandria has a goal of becoming a veterinarian and hopes by selecting the correct curriculum and talking to her professors will help her to achieve her goal. Alexandria has set a plan into motion by networking with her professors because a 4.0 GPA alone will not help her to realize your dreams. Alexandria and Nevaeh demonstrated relatedness. Alexandria’s professor told her she wanted her to succeed and Nevaeh’s professor told her it was okay for her to talk about her disability and not to be ashamed of it. Alexandria felt good that one of her professors wanted her
to be successful despite her learning disability and Nevaeh felt that someone really understood her and how she felt.

All of the participants described obstacles and adversities they encountered in high school and college; however they indicated that they had an inner desire to succeed and was very determined. Alexandria said she had to push herself really hard because she knows that that she is at a disadvantage but she had an inner desire to be the best that she could be and maintain her 4.0 GPA and graduate early to attend veterinary school. Nevaeh displayed self-determination when she talked about how the finish line was right there and she had to keep going. The participants also articulated that no one or nothing could take that drive to succeed from them because they were in control of their own destinies. Three things became apparent to the researcher after a careful review of notes, reading the transcripts, reviewing the journal and listening to the recordings again: 1. These participants wanted to succeed and no one could do it for them, 2. They had to work harder than their peers because they were students with LDs and clearly at a disadvantage, and 3. One of the factors that have caused them to become successful was their intrinsic motivation. The participants basically said the same thing differently and the researcher interpreted what was said and made sense of their experiences by reviewing notes, recordings and transcripts.

**Interactions with Professors were Generally Positive**

Most of the participants in this study had positive things to say about their professors. However, one participant indicated that one of her professors thought that she was lying about needing accommodations and was difficult until she asked him to look for her accommodations request sent to him by the Disability Coordinator. Other participants articulated that their
professors were helpful and made sure they received their requested accommodations. The researcher sensed the participants did not readily ask their professors for extended time on exams or for assignments because they feared that the professor would think they were incapable of handling the course work.

Faculty has given different responses on accommodating college students with learning disabilities. Some faculty members respond positively, providing whatever accommodation is requested. Other faculty members refuse to provide accommodations or what they perceive as “differential treatment” (Scott, 1997). Surveys of faculty attitudes reveal that majority of faculty members are willing to accommodate students with learning disabilities; however, they struggle with ethical concerns in the balance of the rights of students with learning disabilities with the academic integrity of the course and institution (McCarthy & Campbell, 1993).

Research on college faculty attitudes indicates that faculty members are willing to provide students with minor accommodations (e.g., recorded lectures or additional time during exams). The participants indicated that some of their professors gave them extended test time, made allowance for them to copy their lectures notes, audio recordings of the lectures were allowed to be recorded and frequently meetings between the professors and students took place during professors’ office hours. However, faculty members sometimes have lower academic expectations for students with LD than for students without learning disabilities (Houck, Asselin, Troutman, & Arrington, 1992). One of the participants in this study did not want to reveal that she had a learning disability to her professor. She expressed concerns about her professor looking at her as being dumb. Findings from studies of college students’ perceptions indicate that students with learning disabilities perceive that faculty lack of knowledge regarding
disability issues, have “poor” attitudes towards students with learning disabilities, and are not receptive to accommodation requests (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, & Acosta, 2005).

**Implications for Practice**

A scholar practitioner is an individual whose work or practice is informed by inquiry or scholarship (Nganga, 2011). One of the goals that the researcher had for this study was to provide new insight into how students with a learning disability experienced college, so that the findings could inform and influence current practices at Cusseta University. The research findings may be beneficial to high school students with learning disabilities and their families, college faculty members, disabilities offices and college administrators. The researcher, who is an orientation instructor and a public/private school liaison will use these findings to proactively help improve the experiences of students with LDs starting by being more cognizant of their needs and feelings. The researcher (orientation instructor) will make sure that the students receive accommodations (give more time to take exams and do projects) even if they don’t ask for it and meet regularly with the students to see if they are having any problems academically.

The findings of the current study suggest some professors understand the academic needs of students with learning disabilities. They respected the accommodation requests from the students and some professors actually showed compassion. However, there were some professors who did not readily accommodate the students and some training about learning disabilities may be beneficial to them. The participants in the study, who had learning disabilities, were capable individuals who had set goals for themselves and had plans on how to achieve them. A learning disability did not define the participants because it was only a small integral part of who they were. Students with a LD may begin at a disadvantage point; however,
this adversity may be overcome by having professors who understand learning disabilities and how to support students. Participants in this study indicated that professors who took time to explain materials and were willing to devote a little extra time with them made a great difference. Also, the participants indicated the use of accommodations played a part in them being academically successful.

Some of the participants admitted that they were unclear what a “learning disability” was when they were in high school and there was help for it. An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is required for each student with a disability in kindergarten through the 12th grade and parents advocate for their child. However, upon reaching postsecondary level, the laws change and the responsibility shifts to the student. Therefore, students should be taught early on about the laws, their rights, how to advocate for accommodations, and positive self-concept. It is everyone’s responsibility including high school teachers, counselors, administrators and parents to arm these students with knowledge and tools to ensure they are prepared for post-secondary education.

One of the participants in this study indicated that her professor seemed uncaring about her disability and disregarded her need for accommodations. Faculty members cannot legally dismiss a student’s request for accommodations just because they do not understand what it is or feel that it gives an unfair edge to the student. Students with learning disabilities and other disabilities are protected under the Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Therefore, there should be periodically disability training for all faculty members. Students with a learning disability may learn differently, but this does not mean that they cannot learn, or that they should expect to have standards lowered for them. Accommodations do not give the student an extra advantage, but rather allow them an equal opportunity to express what they have learned.
Therefore, training for faculty on learning disabilities and sensitivity may be a great asset for all concerned because the enrollment of students with learning disabilities increases every year.

The findings from this research may show the administrators at Cusseta University that an Office of Disability Services needs to be established. Currently, there are two counselors serving over 3,000 students and each counselor has an added responsibility such as serving as a Disability Coordinator, while the other serves as Veterans’ Coordinator. Students with learning and other disabilities are a vulnerable population and much attention should be given to them as required by the law. The establishment of a fulltime Office of Disability Services fully staffed may ensure that the students are serviced efficiently and expeditiously.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

One of the limitations cited in existing literature on college students with learning disabilities is that their experiences in college are not examined. The current study adds to the literature, the students’ experiences from their perspectives. Future research should further explore students’ high school experiences prior to entering college in order to understand the needs of students with disabilities at the post-secondary level. A study that includes high school student participants and their parents may provide insight about what students with a learning disability should expect in college.

The replication of this study with a different student population will add to the current literature. Students with other cognitive and physical disabilities are likely to yield different results. Learning disability is considered as a “hidden disability” and physical disabilities are apparent and would require different type of accommodations; therefore, the experiences would likely be different. Additionally, this current study had limitations: small sample size, no ethnic
diversity reflected in the sample and location. The college was small with a student population of 3,000 students and all of the participants were from the same ethnic group and every classification was not represented. Therefore, a study consisting of a larger number of participants from a varied ethnic group representing freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors would likely yield different results.

The majority of studies completed about college students with LDs graduated from a public or private high school. A study consisting of home-schooled students with LDs entering into college would likely yield different results. This group of participants would go in the study with different experiences because they would not have been exposed to peer pressure and other social influences.

Finally, one important factor to the success of students with disabilities in postsecondary institutions is the knowledge and attitudes of the faculty about students with disabilities. Therefore, a study that examined the professors’ perspective of having students with disabilities in their classes may lead to better training for faculty.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to understand and make sense of the experiences of college students with learning disabilities. The participants often had obstacles in high school and college. Some of the participants had fears of being stigmatized and found it necessary to conceal their learning disability. Although the students faced adversities, they were shown to have great resilience and found different ways to prevail. The majority of the participants had good interactions with faculty members and found that the use of accommodations made a significant difference in their success.
The results of this study suggest that Cusseta University must rethink its disposition on how to enhance the learning experiences of students with learning disabilities. Training on how to teach students with learning disabilities should be provided for professors. Also, there is a need for a full time disability counselor available for the students. Students with learning disabilities may not readily want to utilize accommodations because they want to conceal their disability in fear of being stigmatized. Therefore, a disability counselor should be prepared to disseminate information to the students. The counselor may disseminate information to students via email notifications, representation at campus events and by encouraging professors to mention disability services in class and in their course syllabi. Ultimately, it is important for all parties involved to work together to create an inviting atmosphere for students with a learning disability to attain a rewarding learning experience.

An important contribution of the study is that of giving voice to college students with learning disabilities. It is clear that the students’ experiences were unique to them; however, there were some commonalities. This study contributes to the current literature on college students with learning disabilities by providing the unique experiences of those with learning disabilities.
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Rights and Responsibilities of College Students with Learning Disabilities (LD) (n. d.),


Appendix A

Research Study
for a Northeastern University Doctoral Thesis

Cusseta University Students

The purpose of this proposed study is to better understand the experiences and self-determination of upperclassmen college students with a learning disability.

Who is Eligible?
You are eligible if you meet all of the following criteria:

Registered with Cusseta University Office of Counseling office to receive accommodations.

Have a documented learning disability.

Have completed at least two semesters of college.

Age 18-24

What will you be asked to do?

Have three 45–60 minute interviews with a researcher from Northeastern University. In the interview you will be asked questions about your college experience and self-determination at Cusseta University.

Compensation

You will receive a $20.00 gift card/certificate from the campus bookstore for your participation in this study.

If you have any questions or are interested in participating, please contact:

Beverly Ebo at (334) 740-4548 or Email: ebo.b@husky.neu.edu
Appendix B
Permission Letter to Gain Access

[Date]

Ms. Renee Brooks
Vice President for Student Affairs
Cusseta University
City, State Zip

Re: Assistance in Recruitment of Students With Learning Disabilities

Dear Ms. Brooks:

This letter is to formally ask for assistance from the Counseling Office. I am a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University and I am also an employee at the university. I plan to conduct a study for my thesis which is titled: **Understanding the Experiences of College Students with Learning Disabilities**. The research study is to better understand the experiences and self-determination of upperclassmen college students with learning disabilities. It is my hope that the findings from this study will bring awareness of these students’ experiences to the administration, faculty and staff. Moreover, administration may be able to use the findings to assist students with learning disabilities by improving and providing better support and services to them in order for them to successfully become a graduate from this university.

I am soliciting your approval for me to work with the Counseling Center staff to recruit some students to participate in my study. The assistance that I am seeking from the Counseling Center staff is for them to forward a recruitment email and flyer about the study from me to the registered students with learning disabilities. This project will ask the participant to be interviewed three times (each interview will last 30-45 minutes). There is no risk involved and the participant may stop at any time. This study will only take place after receiving approval from Cusseta University’s and Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Boards (IRBs). The data collected will remain confidential at all times and steps will be taken to protect the identity of the students interviewed for this study.

Thank you in advance for your assistance. I look forward to learning more about the experiences of students with learning disabilities and hope to have a positive impact in some way.

Sincerely,

Beverly A. Ebo
Ed.D. Candidate
Appendix C
Recruitment Email

Dear Student:

My name is Beverly A. Ebo and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University in Boston, MA. I am also a Public/Private School Liaison and a Freshman Orientation Instructor at Cusseta University. The Counseling Office has agreed to help me recruit by forwarding my email to several students to participate in a doctoral research study for my thesis, which is titled: Understanding the Experiences of College Students with Learning Disabilities.

I am conducting a research study to better understand the experiences and self-determination of upperclassmen college students with a learning disability. It is hoped the findings from this study will bring awareness of your experiences to administration. Moreover, administration may be able to use the findings to assist students with learning disabilities by improving and providing better support and services to students in order for them to successfully become a graduate from this university.

I am recruiting participants who meet the following criteria:

a) are registered with Cusseta University Office of Counseling office to receive accommodations
b) have a learning disability
c) have completed at least two semesters of college
d) are traditional age (18-24)

Students who agree to participate will be asked to do the following:

a) Talk with me by telephone to confirm their interest in participating, answer some demographic questions and to set up the in person interviews.
b) Meet with me one-on-one at any location you choose to participate in two confidential 30-45 minute interviews about their experiences as a college student with a learning disability.
c) Read a copy of the interview transcription (a word-for-word account of what was said in the interview), and then let me know if they would like to add or clarify anything.

Participation is voluntary, and students are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Students who participate in the interviews will receive a $20 campus bookstore gift card/certificate.

If you meet all of the above criteria, and wish to participate in this research study, please call me at 334 740-4548 or email ebo.b@husky.neu.edu

Thank you for your time!

Beverly

Ebo
Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Graduate Programs-Higher Education Administration

Name of Investigators: Principal Investigator--Dr. Carol Young, Student Researcher--Beverly A. Ebo

Title of Project: Understanding the Experiences of College Students with Learning Disabilities

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

You are invited to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are asked to be in this study because you are a college student who:

a) has a documented learning disability

b) has completed at least two semesters of college

c) is of traditional age (18-24)

d) is registered with the Office of Counseling at the university to receive accommodations.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences of college students with learning disabilities as they navigate their way through college.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to:

a) Talk with the researcher by telephone to confirm your interest in participating, eligibility and to schedule in-person interviews
b) Complete two 45-60 minute in person confidential interviews with the researcher about your experiences as a college student with a learning disability

**Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?**

The initial telephone call (interview) should be 45-60 minutes. You will subsequently be interviewed at a time and any place that is convenient for you. The second interview will take about 45 to 60 minutes as well as the final interview.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**

There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort anticipated with your participation in this study.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help future researchers and university administrators to improve upon the experiences of college students with learning disabilities who wish to attend college.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way as taking part in this project. Pseudonyms will be used to keep your name and the name of your institution confidential. Only the researchers will have access to the data materials during the research study. An outside transcriptionist will be provided with the audio-recordings of the interviews, but no additional identifying information will be included. Transcriptions will only be used for the purposes of the current research study. All data, both paper and electronic, will be kept locked and secured in one of the researchers’ home office. Paper data and information, including interview notes and signed consent forms, will be stored in a locked filing cabinet along with the digital audio recorder containing the original interview recordings. Electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer that is only accessible to the researcher.

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**

You may voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

There is minimal risk harm for you in this study. During interviews, there is the possibility that you may experience psychological vulnerability as you address subjects or experiences of a sensitive or stigmatizing nature. However, these risks are minimal in nature and are unlikely to cause harm to you. However, should you share concerns during the interviews for which the researcher thinks you might need additional assistance, you will be referred to the appropriate campus support systems.
Can I stop my participation in this study?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may stop at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a student at your institution.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Beverly A. Ebo, Student Researcher at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or ebo.b@husky.neu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Carol Young, Principal Investigator at c.young@neu.edu

Whom can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Northeastern Univ., Human Subject Research Protection, 360 Huntington Ave., Mailstop: 490 Renaissance Park, Boston, MA 02115-5000, Phone: 617.373.4588; Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?

You will be given a $20 gift card/certificate to the campus bookstore as soon as you read over the transcript for accuracy at the final meeting.

Will it cost me anything to participate?

There is no anticipated cost to you to participate in this study.

I agree to take part in this research.

__________________________________________ Date

Signature of person agreeing to take part

__________________________________________ Date

Printed name of person above

__________________________________________ Date

Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtain consent.
Appendix E

Informed Consent Form

Cusseta University

**Title of Project:** Understanding the Experiences of College Students with Learning Disabilities

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

**Investigators**

Principal Investigator: Carol Young, EdD    Student Researcher: Beverly A. Ebo, M.Ed.

**Purpose of the Research**

This research study is designed to understand the experiences of college students with learning disabilities and their self-determination as they navigate their way through college.

**Procedures**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview with the student investigator. In the interview you will be asked questions about your college experience and self-determination at the university. Your participation will take approximately 10 minutes for an initial telephone interview and two 30-45 minutes in person interview. Two to three weeks later, I will ask you to meet me at my office for you to read a copy of the interview transcription (a word-for-word account of what was said in the interview), which I will ask you to read. You may then let me know if you would like to add or clarify anything.

**Potential Risks or Discomforts**

There is minimal risk of harm for you in this study. During interviews, there is the possibility that you may experience psychological vulnerability as you describe your experiences of a sensitive or stigmatizing nature. However, these risks are minimal in nature and are unlikely to cause harm to you. However, should you share concerns during the interviews for which the researcher thinks you might need additional assistance, you will be referred to the appropriate campus support systems.

**Potential Benefits of the Research**

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help future researchers and disability services professionals improve upon the experiences of college students with learning disabilities who wish to utilize academic
accommodations. Additionally, administrators may be able to use the findings from this study to assist LD students to be successful in college and graduate.

Confidentiality and Data Storage

No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way as taking part in this project. Pseudonyms will be used to keep your name and the name of your institution confidential. Only the researchers will have access to the data materials during the research study. An outside transcriptionist will be provided with the audio-recordings of the interviews, but no additional identifying information will be included. Transcriptions will be completed in accordance with the confidentiality standards of that industry. The data will only be used for the purposes of the current research study. All data, both paper and electronic, will be kept locked and secured in one of the researchers’ home office. Paper data and information, including interview notes and signed consent forms, will be stored in a locked filing cabinet along with the digital audio recorder containing the original interview recordings. Electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer that is only accessible to the researcher. Per the college’s requirement, the data will be stored under lock and key for at least 3 years after completion of the study. After the 3 years have passed, the researcher will destroy the audiotapes by shredding them.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. As a participant you may refuse to participate at any time. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. To withdraw from the study please contact, the person mainly responsible for the research. Beverly A. Ebo at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or ebo.b@husky.neu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Carol Young at c.young@neu.edu.

Questions about the Research

If you have any questions about the research, please speak with Beverly A. Ebo. If you have questions later, you may contact Beverly A. Ebo at ebo.b@husky.neu.edu or by telephone (XXX) XXX-XXXX or Dr. Carol Young at c.young@neu.edu

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participant Review Committee for the Protection of Human Participants. If you believe there is any infringement upon your rights as a research participant, you may contact the HPRC Chair, Dr. Kevin Jones at (XXX) XXX-XXXX at this university or Ms. Kate Skophammer, IRB Coordinator at Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Tel: 617.390.3450; k.skophammer@neu.edu.

You have been given the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered to my satisfaction. My signature below indicates my voluntary agreement to participate in this research study.
Please return one copy of this consent form and keep one copy for your records.

________________________________________                             ______________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent (optional)                                   Date

ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS ONLY WHEN APPROPRIATE

The participant will receive a $20.00 gift card/certificate from the campus bookstore for their participation in this study.
Appendix F

Initial Telephone Interview Protocol

Hello, I am happy that you are interested in participating in my study titled

*Understanding the Experiences of College Students with Learning Disabilities.* I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University in Boston, MA. I am a Public/Private School Liaison and a Freshman Orientation Instructor at the university. I am conducting a study to understand the experiences of college students with learning disabilities, their self-determination and how they navigate their journey to college.

Do you have any questions so far?

If the student has a question, pause to answer it.

If the student does not have a question, continue with script.

I am going to ask you some questions and will let you know if you were selected or not at the end of the conversation.

How many credit hours do you have?

Are you at least 18 or over?

Do you have a learning disability? Please describe your learning disability.

Are you registered with the Disability Counselor as having a document learning disability?
If the student meets the criteria, I will inform the student that he or she is selected and ask for a day and time for a 45-60 minute in person interview. I will ask the student to meet me in my office on the campus or at a place of their choosing on the day and time agreed upon. I will inform the student that we will discuss informed consent and have them to sign the consent form, discuss their project in details, their right to withdraw from the study without a penalty. Also, I will ask the student to write down all questions and bring to the interview so I can answer them.
Appendix G

Interview Protocol
(Second Interview)

Interview questions:

1. How many semesters have you completed at the University?
2. Where are you from?
3. What is your major?
4. What is your classification?
5. Please tell me about your learning disability?
6. How did you feel being diagnosed with a learning disability?
7. How old were you when you found out about your learning disability?
   Prompt: Describe what you thought a learning disability was.
8. What accommodations did you use in high school?
9. Describe the best experience you had in high school after you learned about your disability.
10. Describe the worst experience you had in high school after you learned about your disability?

Interview Protocol
(Third Interview)

1. What motivated you to enroll in college?
2. You are successful because you have graduated from high and now you attending college, would you say that you use self-determination?

   Prompt: If the answer is yes: Please give me an example how self-determination helped you along the way to higher education.

   Prompt: If the answer is no: If you don’t feel that way, what was the driving force
for you to go to college?

3. To you, what is self-determination?

4. Were you concerned about attending college with a learning disability?

5. What goals have you set for yourself?

   **Prompt:** In college? After graduation?

6. What steps have you taken to meet the goals you have set?

7. What steps are you taking to ensure your success at the university?

8. What does being successful at this university mean to you?

9. Please describe how you study for your classes.

10. How has having a learning disability influenced your academics and college life?

11. What extracurricular activities have you participated in since you enrolled in college?

   **Prompt:** What made you decide to participate in the activities?

   **Prompt:** Who did you talk to when deciding whether or not to participate?

12. How and why did you decide to register with the disability services office in college?

   **Prompt:** When did this occur? How did it feel initially and then as time progressed?

   **Prompt:** What was your experience with registering with disability services?

13. What learning disability related accommodations are you using in college now?

   **Prompt:** Who did you talk to when arranging your accommodations?

   **Prompt:** Have you had any problems receiving your accommodations?

   **Prompt:** If so, how did you resolve these problems?

14. What have been your experiences in interacting with faculty?

   **Prompt:** Best experience? Worst experience?

15. Tell me about your best experience since you have been in college?

16. Tell me about your worst experience since you have been in college?
Appendix H

IRB Approval Letter (Northeastern University)
Appendix I

IRB Approval Letter (Cusseta University)
APPENDIX J

Transcriber Confidentiality Statement

CLIENT NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

This CLIENT NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT, effective as of the date last set forth below (this "Agreement"), between the undersigned actual or potential client ("Client") and Rev.com, Inc. ("Rev.com") is made in connection with the understanding and agreement of the parties hereto with respect to certain proprietary information being provided to Rev.com for the purpose of performing translation, transcription, video captions and other document related services (the "Rev.com Services"). In consideration for the mutual agreements contained herein and the other provisions of this Agreement, the parties hereto agree as follows:

1. Scope of Confidential Information

1.1. "Confidential Information" means, subject to the exceptions set forth in Section 1.2 below, any information, writing, document or other data in any form or format, oral or written, whether tangible or intangible, provided to Rev.com by Client or any third party for the purpose of performing the Rev.com Services.

1.2. Confidential information does not include information that (i) was available to the public prior to disclosure of such information by Client and free of any confidentiality obligation in favor of Client; or (ii) is obtained from a third party not known by Rev.com at the time of such availability to be subject to a confidentiality obligation to Client; or (iii) is made available to third parties by Client without restriction on the disclosure of such information; or (iv) is or becomes available to the public other than as a result of disclosure by Rev.com prohibited by this Agreement; or (v) is developed independently by Rev.com or Rev.com's directors, officers, members, partners, employees, contractors, contractors' agents, representatives or affiliated entities (collectively, "Associated Persons").

2. Use and Disclosures of Confidential Information

2.1. Rev.com will keep secret and will not disclose during the term of this Agreement or thereafter, any Confidential Information provided by Client or any Associated Person or otherwise obtained in connection with the Confidential Information for any purpose other than performing the Rev.com Services on Client's behalf. Rev.com will use reasonable care and adequate measures to protect the security of the Confidential Information and to attempt to prevent any Confidential Information from being disclosed or otherwise made available to unauthorized persons or used in violation of the foregoing.

2.2. Notwithstanding anything to the contrary herein, Rev.com is hereby permitted, in the performance of this Agreement, to disclose any Confidential Information in a judicial, legislative or administrative investigation or proceeding or to a government or other regulatory agency, pursuant to law, provided by law, Rev.com provides to Client prior notice of the intended disclosure and permits Client to intervene therein to protect its interests in the Confidential Information, and cooperates with Client in seeking to obtain such protection.

3. Ownership and limitations

3.1. All Confidential Information will remain the property of Client.

3.2. This Agreement imposes no obligations on either party to purchase, sell, license, market or otherwise transfer in any product, service or technology.

4. Indemnity

4.1. Upon Client's written request, Rev.com agrees to use good faith efforts to return promptly to Client any Confidential Information due to be returned and in the possession of Rev.com, and to destroy the return or destruction of all Confidential Information, provided that Rev.com may retain a summary description of Confidential Information for archival purposes.

5. Confidentiality of Client's Information

5.1. Client and Rev.com are independent contractors and will so represent themselves in all regulatory filings. This Agreement will not be construed to make either party the agent or legal representative of the other or to make the parties partners or joint venturers, and neither party may bind the other in any way. This Agreement will be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of the State of California governing such agreements, without regard to conflict-of-law principles. The sole and exclusive jurisdiction and venue for any litigation arising out of this Agreement shall be an appropriate federal or state court located in the State of California, and the parties agree to be bound by any judgment or defenses based upon venue or forum non conveniens. This Agreement (together with any

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agreement for the Rev.com Services) contains the complete and exclusive agreement of the parties with respect to the subject matter hereof and supersedes all prior agreements and understandings with respect thereto, whether written or oral, express or implied. If any provision of this Agreement is held invalid, illegal or unenforceable by a court of competent jurisdiction, such will not affect any other provision of this Agreement, which will remain in full force and effect. No amendment or alteration of the terms of this Agreement will be effective unless made in writing and executed by both parties hereto. A failure or delay in exercising any right in respect to this Agreement will not be presumed to operate as a waiver, and a single or partial exercise of any right will not be presumed to preclude any subsequent or further exercise of that right or the exercise of any other right. Any modification or waiver of any provision of this Agreement will not be effective unless made in writing. Any such waiver will be effective only in the specific instance and for the purpose given.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have caused this Agreement to be executed below by their duly authorized signatories.

CLIENT
Print Name: Beverly A. Ebo

By: Beverly A. Ebo
Name: Beverly A. Ebo
Title: Account Manager
Date: Feb 1, 2016

Address for notices to Client:

REV.COM, INC.

By: Cheryl Brown
Name: Cheryl Brown
Title: Account Manager
Date: February 1, 2016

Address for notices to Rev.com, Inc.:
231 Kearny St. Suite 800
San Francisco, CA 94108

LBC/4524740.1

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Appendix K

NIH Certificate of Completion: Protecting Human Research Participant

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Beverly Ebo successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course ‘Protecting Human Research Participants’.

Date of completion: 11/12/2013
Certification Number: 1324911