Students With Intellectual Disabilities Accessing Postsecondary Education Settings: Promoting Education Equity: Seeing Students for Their Ability First and Supporting Their Development as Contributing Members Into a Diverse Society

Kathleen N. Mercier
Brandman University, kathleen.mercier14@gmail.com

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Students With Intellectual Disabilities Accessing Postsecondary Education Settings:

Promoting Education Equity: Seeing Students for Their Ability First and
Supporting Their Development as Contributing Members

Into a Diverse Society
A Dissertation by
Kathleen Mercier

Brandman University
Irvine, California
School of Education
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership
February 2017

Committee in charge:
J. Lee, Ed.D., Committee Chair
L. Wellner, Ed.D.
L. O’Connor, Ph.D.
BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY

Chapman University System

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

The dissertation of Kathleen Mercier is approved.

______________________________
J. Lee, Ed.D.  
Dissertation Chair

______________________________
L. Wellner, Ed.D  
Committee Member

______________________________
L. O'Connor, Ph.D  
Committee Member

______________________________
P. Clark-White, Ed.D  
Associate Dean

February, 2017
Students With Intellectual Disabilities Accessing Postsecondary Education Settings

Promoting Education Equity: Seeing Students for Their Ability First and

Supporting Their Development as Contributing Members

Into a Diverse Society

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The process of transformational leadership begins with deep reflection of the leader from within and acknowledgement of those who supported the leader during the transformation process. As for myself, in pursuit of becoming a transformational leader, I am thankful for my husband, our children, my family, my dissertation chair and committee, the participants of my research study, and the Brandman University faculty who have contributed to my successful journey in earning a doctoral degree.

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ABSTRACT

Students With Intellectual Disabilities Accessing Postsecondary Education Settings

Promoting Education Equity: Seeing Students for Their Ability First and

Supporting Their Development as Contributing Members

Into a Diverse Society

by Kathleen Mercier

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to examine and describe the lived experiences of seven students with intellectual disabilities (ID) participating in two postsecondary education (PSE) settings in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education.

Through a qualitative approach of ethnography, the researcher examined various stakeholders’ awareness and ability to support students with ID in higher education settings in an effort to support future development of PSE programs for students with ID. Methodology tools included classroom observations, individual interviews, and examination of artifacts from the sample of PSE settings in Southern California supporting students with ID.

Through triangulation of the interviews, observations, and artifacts, the researcher found 13 themes that emerged as substantial stories related to the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE. The findings included that the experiences of the students with ID in PSE were associated with new opportunities, meaningful experiences through independence and teamwork, development of self-advocacy, community acceptance similar to experiences of nondisabled peers, confidence to raise the bar of expectations,
and an understanding of the impact on others through the lived experience of the students with ID in PSE.

As a result of inclusive higher education, the experiences of students with ID in PSE programs focused on developing life skills beyond the classroom through impacting the culture of the college and community, increased acceptance amongst nondisabled peers, and created parallel adult development that led to more fulfilling adult lives and deepened relationships with others.

Recommendations from the research include PSE teams’ need to create interdisciplinary groups that design inclusive, innovative classroom environments that promote community acceptance, acknowledgment of individual ability, and increased relationships; create assessment tools to determine individual strengths and needs; and offer additional scholarships to increase the opportunity to access higher education environments.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The implementation of Public Law 94-142 in 1975, also called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), began a revolution of transformational change in how students with significant disabilities are included and educated alongside their nondisabled peers (Grigal, Neubert, & Moon, 2005). The subsequent reauthorizations of Public Law 94-142 through the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990, 1997, and 2004 continued to challenge transformational change of students’ access to general education. Prior to this act, students with mental retardation, now known as intellectual disability (ID), were excluded from general school settings, ignored and left behind from society as a whole, but now over 4 decades later, all students are recognized for their potential contribution to the world through the support of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA, 2008). The HEOA of 2008 defined a new type of postsecondary education (PSE) program offered to students with ID, called comprehensive transition programs (CTPs). Prior to HEOA (2008), secondary schools were considered the final academic setting that a student with ID would participate in prior to moving into the adult world.

The practice of integrating students with ID on secondary public school campuses was mainly for recreational and social activities; however, in more recent years the concept of mainstreaming has gained momentum. Mainstreaming refers to the practice of integrating students with ID who show some readiness to learn in select general education classes (Kardos, 2011). According to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), students with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) until the semester in which they turn 22
years of age, unless a high school diploma is earned. If a student with ID continues on the secondary school campus after the age of 18, the additional time is used for extended learning opportunities to generalize skills in multiple environments (Kardos, 2011). At an increasing rate, in recent years students with ID, ages 18 to 22, in secondary settings were no longer satisfied with exposure to social and recreational activities with nondisabled peers. Secondary schools were receiving requests for students with ID to gain access to the general education curriculum with accommodations and modifications to be successful with it (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2013; Grigal et al., 2005). Students with ID who had been exposed to rigorous expectations in secondary school desired opportunities to extend their academic learning in a college setting (Weir, Grigal, Hart, & Boyle, 2013).

The legislation of HEOA (2008) provided guidance for colleges and universities to support students with ID within the college environment. It was no longer solely the responsibility of the secondary schools to provide students with ID with access to the skills needed to transition into postsecondary settings. HEOA required that colleges and universities be prepared to support students with ID in continuing their education. HEOA has paved the way for students with ID to extend their learning alongside nondisabled peers beyond secondary school and into the college environment.

**History of PSE Options for Students With ID**

Since the birth of Public Law 94-142, an evolution of transformational change has occurred in how students with significant disabilities are educated. Prior to this law, after the age of 22, students with ID typically transitioned into sheltered workshops or adult day-programs; however, the demand for equal access to education for all students
continues to be a hot topic (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Thoma et al. (2011) completed a
review of literature from 2001 to 2010 to determine whether there had been significant
improvements in the PSE programs offered in the United States. They noted that a
comprehensive study of programs was completed earlier by Neubert, Moon, Grigal, and
Reed in 2001. In this current study, Thoma et al. reported out on the advancements that
PSE programs had made; however, the findings included that PSE programs were most
often identified as servicing students ages 18-21 who continue to receive collaborative
services from their public school district, and little information was collected on the
perceptions of participant outcomes. The study suggested further research on
participants’ outcomes after the age of 22 (Thoma et al., 2011; see also Baer, Daviso,
Flexer, Queen, & Meindl, 2011).

According to Hart (2006), there are approximately 110 PSE programs across 28
states. Many of these programs are funded by the families or partially by supporting
agencies to the students. Typically, courses taken as an audit or for mainstreaming
purposes are not covered by financial aid. This can make it very difficult for students
with ID even to consider a PSE because they would not have the time to delay entering
the job force, yet if financial aid could be offered, the students would be able to access
the PSE and exit more prepared to be successful in the job market. As of 2016, according
to the Think College (n.d.) website, 267 PSE programs existed nationwide, and 20 were
within the state of California. In 2010, 26 PSE programs participated in the Transition
and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) grant
where 26 implemented dynamic opportunities for students with ID to access college
(Weir et al., 2013). As of 2015, 26 colleges, some of which had also participated in
2010, received a combined total of over $9 million to support the development of PSE for students with ID (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

**Students With ID in PSE**

According to the research identified thus far, PSE programs can range from serving 18- to 22-year-olds still receiving support from the public school, to students with ID who are accessing undergraduate courses and are over the age of 22. It is important to note the experiences and perceptions that students report upon leaving educational settings in order to make improvements for the next group of students who would participate. Repetto et al. (2011) reported results from a survey of 2,520 high school-aged students with and without disabilities across 40 school districts. Interestingly, their results indicated that students with disabilities felt confident in knowing what they wanted to do after high school but lacked confidence in social interactions. Students without disabilities indicated that they felt well versed in navigating social situations and felt confident with academic skills. A gap exists in the knowledge of how to support students with disabilities as they enter postsecondary programs. They would have a good understanding of their skills and capability yet lack the confidence in sharing with others how their skills would benefit a business or organization. The challenge is to take this information and create opportunities for students to be successful no matter what postsecondary setting they move into (Repetto et al., 2011).

**Transition, Accommodations, and Access to PSE**

Developing PSE programs will require collaboration with stakeholders and an openness to consider accommodations necessary to ensure success for the participants. Each student will need to be looked at on an individual basis, similar to how the
individual education plan (IEP) in public schools designed a unique program to meet each student’s needs (Grigal & Hart, 2010). In order to facilitate student engagement and leadership in the transition process, the team must consider each student’s strengths first. The Council for Exceptional Children’s Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) has been a longstanding leader and advocate in the field of secondary education for students with disabilities (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013). Before a student transitions to a PSE program, the student must be skilled in advocating for his or her needs and speaking up regarding his or her strengths (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012). The first step in this process is to familiarize the students with their learning styles and preferences, and needed accommodations to support areas of weakness. Students must understand that weaknesses are common amongst all human beings; the difference in people’s integrity is how they overcome their weaknesses and turn them into strengths. Teaching students when and how to access necessary accommodations will support them in making good choices not only with their education but also in their complex adult lives by being able to be effective communicators, problem solvers, and creative and collaborative school/work partners.

Additionally, to be in compliance with IDEIA (2004), Indicator 13 requires that students who qualify for special education services in secondary school must have a reasonable plan to support their development of educational, career, and independent living skills for adulthood. The individual transition plan (ITP) must be developed before a student’s 16th birthday, and the goals must be updated no less than annually thereafter and based on age-appropriate transition assessments that will reasonably enable the
student to meet his or her postsecondary goals (California Department of Education, 2016).

For students with ID, development of the ITP is critical to ascertain their desires to continue their education in postsecondary school. It is the responsibility of the secondary school ITP team to equip the students with ID with the necessary prerequisite skills to participate in higher education. Students with ID who are better prepared for adulthood through their postsecondary transition plan developed in secondary school will have a greater likelihood of success in higher education, in competitive employment, and as independent adults (IDEIA, 2004). The goal of Indicator 13, according to IDEIA (2004), recognizes that adequately preparing students with ID and other disabilities for adult transition through secondary school supports will increase access to higher education and eliminate the need for sheltered workshops because the students are better prepared to be successful in PSE (Paiewonsky, 2011; Simonsen & Neubert, 2013).

**Barriers to Consider in PSE**

Barriers to creating PSE experiences for students with ID would come from a mindset of what one believes is the expectation of a college setting. Understanding the outside forces and organizational change drivers that influence one’s ability to see the benefit of PSE for students with ID is crucial to the successful development of a PSE program (Anderson & Anderson, 2010). Encouraging students to recognize their own potential begins with teaching self-worth and celebrating success instead of identifying mistakes. Mistakes are an integral part of moving toward success; however, in order to balance a mistake as a learning opportunity, at least two positive successes need to occur (Strieker, Sloan, Stern, & Wade, 2010). Gallinger (2013) discussed social theory and
related it to the changes in educational expectations over time. Generational expectations and roles and responsibilities define what educational opportunities should reinforce, but as expectations change within society, so do educational course standards. In order to meet the varied needs of society, an inclusive ideology regarding creating learning environments for all students to maximize their potential through postsecondary experiences is crucial (Duff, 2013; Farnham, 2011; Gallinger, 2013).

**Think College Standards for Quality PSE**

Due to the growth of PSE programs for students with ID over the past 10 years, the need for high-quality standards and a systematic approach to the development of such programs has been in high demand (Weir, Hart, & Grigal, 2010/2011). The National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) and the Administration on Developmental Disabilities collaborated to define a set of standards that could be used by existing programs to improve, or for new programs looking to offer students with ID access to a college experience (Weir et al., 2010/2011).

In 2009, the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston partnered with TransCen, Inc., to develop the standards and quality indicators that would serve as a guide for other colleges in the development of PSE programs for students with ID (Grigal & Hart, 2010). In 2011, eight standards, quality indicators, and benchmarks were identified as crucial for the development of PSE for students with ID. They included academic access, career development, social networks, fostering self-determination, integration with college systems and practices, coordination and collaboration, sustainability, and ongoing evaluation (Grigal & Hart, 2010). These eight standards align to the criteria defined in the HEOA (2008) for the development of a CTP
and are vital to establishing comprehensive and inclusive PSE programs for students with ID (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011; Weir et al., 2013).

**Gaps in the Research**

Creating and sustaining PSE settings is vital for future generations to continue as lifelong learners. Research has suggested this process must begin with a collaborative effort between secondary education and PSE settings (Duff, 2013; Gallinger, 2013; Grigal & Hart, 2010; Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011). Through collaboration between the two entities, programs can be drafted according to the specific needs of those involved to create a framework of expectations, desired outcomes for participants, and potential community impact. While students are still in secondary school, teams can work diligently to prepare these students for success in PSE settings. By identifying the attitudes and perceptions of those who have completed PSE programs, stakeholders can use this information to further develop PSE programs that meet the needs of all participants and anticipate the needs of upcoming learners. Landmark, Ju, and Zhang (2010) identified substantiated best practices for transition up to 15 years after successful transition from PSE settings.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

Students with significant cognitive disabilities have not been provided with the same opportunities to access a college experience as students with zero to mild disabilities (Fekete, 2013; Hartz, 2014; Westling, Kelley, Cain, & Prohn, 2013). According to IDEIA (2004), students with significant cognitive disabilities have the right to access an education in the least restrictive environment to gain the skills necessary to contribute as functional members of society. In order to do so, students with significant
disabilities require additional time to learn skills and become proficient (Grigal et al., 2012; Kessler Foundation & National Organization on Disability, 2010).

If students with significant disabilities had the opportunity to engage in an age-appropriate postsecondary setting where they were able to extend the mastery of the skills they learned while in secondary prevocational programs, these students would be better equipped and ready to engage in the workforce after completing a postsecondary program (Grigal & Hart, 2010; La Vigne, 2015; Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009). When students with significant cognitive disabilities become integral members of their diverse communities, they can contribute more to the global impact of the communities instead of relying on their communities to care for them (Grigal & Hart, 2010; Thoma, Bartholomew, & Scott, 2009; Shaw & Dukes, 2013).

When the ultimate transition goal for an individual with ID is gainful employment, the likelihood of prolonged success is contingent on several factors before the individual can access the employment opportunity. PSE for students with ID, along with work experience, family involvement, general education inclusion, social skills training, daily living skills, self-determination, and community/agency collaboration, will prepare students with ID to become successful members of a diverse society (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Landmark et al., 2010; Repetto et al., 2011).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to examine and describe the lived experiences of seven students with intellectual disabilities (ID) participating in two postsecondary education (PSE) settings in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education.
Research Question

This study was guided by one central question designed to explore the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education, to investigate and examine the lived experiences of students with ID participating in PSE settings in Southern California. The research question for this study was as follows: What were the lived experiences of students with ID participating in PSE programs in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education?

Significance of the Problem

The efforts of many over the past 4 decades have resulted in multiple opportunities for students with ID that 40 years ago did not exist. Parents of students with disabilities, self-advocating disabled students, special education teachers and providers, transition specialists, educational consultants, administrators, and many other stakeholders have continued to press the boundaries of inclusive education for all students, including PSE experiences for students with ID. The ultimate goal of all stakeholders has always been to offer the most appropriate and least restrictive services to students to build a foundation of skills readily available to use, when necessary, as contributors to this diverse society (Grigal et al., 2013; Hart, 2006, Kardos, 2011).

Research has shown that in order for individuals with ID to secure gainful employment, their participation in PSE significantly enhances their long-term success in the employment world (Fekete, 2013; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013). In 2010, the Kessler Foundation and National Organization on Disability completed a Survey of Employment of Americans with Disabilities within the United States in order to gain
information on closing the employment gap between people with and without disabilities since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The research showed that only 21% of people with disabilities, ages 18 to 64, reported being gainfully employed, compared to 59% of people without disabilities (Kessler Foundation & National Organization on Disability, 2010).

A research gap exists in targeting the effects of evidence-based practices, such as the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education, and the effective outcomes of students with ID who have participated in postsecondary programs (Farnham, 2011; Furgang, 2013; Voelker, 2013). President Barack Obama’s support of the HEOA of 2008 encouraged all students to consider accessing PSE in an effort to gain the skills necessary to become employable in the 21st century (HEOA, 2008). In order to continue increasing enrollment for students with ID in PSE, which increased from 8.4% in 1990 to 28.1% in 2005, colleges will need to consider using the Think College standards to create inclusive and meaningful experiences for students with ID who wish to access a PSE prior to entering into gainful employment (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011; Newman et al., 2011).

As a result of the study using the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education to examine the lived experiences that students with ID had as a result of their participation in PSE in Southern California, one could understand how the experiences related to their success as employable and independent adults in a diverse society. Ultimately, providing students with significant disabilities with an opportunity to extend their learning in an age-appropriate setting increases the likelihood of the students fulfilling their role as active citizens in their communities by

**Defining Key Terms**

The importance of defining the key terms was to identify a common frame of reference on key terms related to the study. The definitions of key terms provided time references for significant changes in terms used to describe students with cognitive deficiencies, and the laws and policies written to work toward creating equitable learning environments for students with disabilities.

**Intellectual disability (ID).** ID refers to students with significant learning, cognitive, and other conditions that, without strong systems of support for accommodations and modifications, would make it difficult for them to perform at the same rate as a nondisabled peer (HEOA, 2008). This includes students who (a) take alternative state assessments, (b) exit secondary education with a certificate of completion instead of a typical high school diploma, and (c) qualify to receive a FAPE until they reach 22 years of age (Hart, 2006).

**Mental retardation (MR).** Students with ID used to be labeled as MR, but in 2010, Public Law 111-256, known as Rosa’s Law, changed all previous terminology referring to students with MR to the new term of ID.

**Least restrictive environment (LRE).** LRE refers to the concept that all students deserve to be educated in a typical setting the same as what would be offered to nondisabled students but with the necessary accommodations to level the playing field of access to the core curriculum at a pace that enables each individual student to master individual goals with the content.
Postsecondary education (PSE). PSE refers to the educational training that occurs after secondary school is completed through completion of a high school diploma or a certificate of completion according to the student’s IEP. For this study, PSE refers to an educational setting consisting of 2- or 4-year programs for students with ID who wish to continue their education after high school.

Comprehensive transition program (CTP). For means of this study, a CTP is defined as a PSE setting that services students with ID and abides by the eight standards for inclusive higher education as defined by Think College (Grigal & Hart, 2010). These standards, quality indicators, and benchmarks reflect perspectives from professionals in the field of PSE who are knowledgeable about serving students with ID and developmental disabilities (DD). The standards were developed through funding from the National Institute on Disability Rehabilitation and Research in order to create inclusive, academic, and valid standards that other institutes of higher education (IHEs) could use to develop and sustain programs for students with ID (Grigal & Hart, 2010; Grigal et al., 2013).

Think College. Think College was an initiative out of the University of Massachusetts Boston’s Institute for Community Inclusion, and its purpose was to provide a network of professional practice and research surrounding the promotion of PSE programs for students with ID and DD (Grigal & Hart, 2010).

Inclusive education. According to IDEIA (2004), inclusive education refers to placement in a public school setting where students with disabilities have access to age-appropriate, nondisabled peers to gain the skills to become functional members in society.
Individual education plan (IEP). The IEP document refers to a strategic, individual learning plan for students who qualify for special education services as students with a disability (Education for All Handicap Children Act [EAHCA], 1975). The IEP is a legal document that is required in public schools for students who qualify, and the document must be updated no later than on an annual basis to determine present levels of functioning, goals, accommodations, services, and the educational setting appropriate to meet the needs of the student to participate in the LRE and have access to education alongside nondisabled peers (IDEIA, 2004).

Individual transition plan (ITP). The ITP is the driving force of the IEP document to prepare students for post-high school success. For students with ID to be prepared for postsecondary settings, including a college environment, the students must explore an interest, ability, and needs as related to the educational, employment, and independent settings available (IDEIA, 2004).

Universal design for learning (UDL). The UDL framework recognizes the newest advancements in brain research and how students of all learner types can optimize their learning experience (Connell et al., 1997). UDL principles include the teacher as a facilitator of the environment, who engages the students in purposeful activities to motivate the learners, presents the content in multiple ways so that the learners understand what they are learning, and encourages the learners to express what the learning has meant to them through meaningful experience (CAST, n.d.).

Cultural informant. A cultural informant would support the researcher by providing information about the microculture within the group that would not be visible or easily understood by the ethnographer (researcher). The cultural informant would
assist the researcher in gaining a deeper understanding of the cultural nuances unique to the group being studied so that the ethnographer is better able to navigate and understand the interconnectedness within the cultural group (Spradley, 1980).

**Etic.** An etic perspective refers to the approach by the ethnographer as an outsider looking in on the culture being observed in order to create understanding about the inner workings of the cultural dynamic perceived. An etic approach to research relies on the scientific reality of the ethnographer in order to make sense of the observations of the cultural group (Fetters, 2010).

**Emic.** An emic approach used by the ethnographer relies on the internal investigation from those within the cultural group as an individual account of meaning of behavior (Fetters, 2010). The researcher used an emic approach to collect the data through intensive interviews and observations, soliciting the expression of perception from the cultural group.

**Delimitations**

According to Patton (2015), delimitations are the boundaries set to conduct the study. This study was bounded by (a) the number of PSE programs in Southern California; (b) PSE administrators, faculty, students with ID (age 18-28) in PSE, family members of students with ID in PSE, and non-disabled peers in three PSE settings in Southern California; (c) access and proximity of the PSE setting in relation to the researcher; and (d) the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education.

In choosing the sample for the study, a delimitation due to the number of PSE programs in Southern California caused the researcher to consider two of the seven PSE
programs in Southern California. The boundaries of the sample were generated by identifying the population of 250 PSE programs nationwide and, within that, the target population of 16 PSE programs within California. The population and target population were identified through the 2016 Think College database.

The study was also delimited by the availability and willingness of the participants (PSE administrators, faculty, students with ID in PSE, family members of students with ID in PSE, and nondisabled peers) who engaged in the study on a voluntary basis during the fall of 2016. All data were collected by the researcher as an ethnographer, and it was assumed that all participants engaged in the interviews and observations to the best of their ability.

Finally, the results of the study were delimited to the two PSE settings in Southern California to which the researcher had reasonable access and proximity to collect data and that adhered to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education. It is unknown to what extent the sample from this study was truly representative of the larger population of PSE settings across the United States; however, the framework used to identify the sample sites for this study was identical to the framework that other PSE programs for students with ID use across the United States and in California.

**Organization of the Study**

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I provided an introduction and history of PSE options for students with ID; discussed the Think College standards for quality PSE; identified gaps in the research; and provided a statement of the research problem, purpose statement, research question, significance of the problem, definitions,
and delimitations of the study. Chapter II engages the reader with a thorough review of current literature on PSE programs and students with ID, provides a historical background of educational law that supports learning in higher education, and highlights how a student with ID would prepare for PSE according to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education, which was the foundation of the research conducted. Chapter III defines the rationale for the methodology used to answer the research question, describes the population and sample, identifies the instruments used to collect the data and how the researcher analyzed the data, and recognizes the limitations of the current study. Chapter IV synthesizes and triangulates the data that were collected to present the richest story of the collective participants. Finally, Chapter V includes a summary of key findings, conclusions drawn from the findings, implications and recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks by the researcher.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Students with disabilities have had open access to postsecondary educational (PSE) experiences, yet over the last 40 decades, these institutions have only attempted to serve students with unique learning needs. Students with intellectual disabilities (ID), however, have not been included in postsecondary settings at the same rate as their nondisabled peers due to the lack of program development and strategic supports needed to meet the diverse needs of this learner type (Grigal et al., 2013). Federal initiatives such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 and its subsequent reauthorizations over 19 years, the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008 have created opportunities for students with disabilities to gain access to the educational environment alongside nondisabled peers and to be recognized as contributing members in a diverse society (Nauherimer, Ryan, & Peebles, 2015; Van Haneghan, 2012).

The purpose of the literature review was to identify the historical and legal variables relevant to the study and to provide a history of postsecondary programs over the last 40 years to construct a frame of reference surrounding serving students with ID in PSE. The review of literature considered planning needs from secondary to postsecondary settings, options for education in the least restrictive environment (LRE), and the Think College framework for inclusive higher education. A few seminal studies explored the student experience in various models of PSE programs and identified benefits and barriers for students with ID in PSE. Finally, the review examined
similarities of other studies and identified the gaps in current literature to substantiate the need for further research in the area of inclusive PSE settings for students with ID. 

**History of Educational Law for Students With ID**

In order to gain a rich background of the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE settings, one must consider the evolution of special education law as it relates to support of students with ID. A thorough examination of the history of educational law showed an evolution from seclusion in education to inclusion and person-centered planning. Person-centered planning refers to seeing the student as a human being first and a student with a disability second (IDEA, 1990). Since the implementation of the HEOA of 2008, students with disabilities have been highlighted for their contributions instead of hidden for their differences, and through the support of universal design for learning (UDL), students with ID have been able to enroll in postsecondary settings and participate in comprehensive transition programs (CTPs) in the LRE, which includes an age-appropriate setting alongside their nondisabled peers.

**Educational Law Before 1975**

What was first known as Public Law 94-142, the EAHCA, created access for students with disabilities to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the LRE and alongside their nondisabled peers (EAHCA, 1975). In the 1970s, segregated educational settings and institutions for students with ID were shut down due, in part, to the efforts of parents of students with disabilities bringing litigation and advocating for their students’ rights to attend public school (Grigal et al., 2013). This movement created opportunities for students with ID to be seen as individuals and to engage in classroom learning similar to their nondisabled peers. Public schools were charged with aligning
the students’ needs to the classroom setting, as appropriate, for the students to participate. Individual educational plan (IEP) teams were responsible for making the decision on which academic environment on the public school campus would be best for the students (Grigal et al., 2013).

**Section 504 of Rehabilitation Act**

In 1973, with a focus on civil rights, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was created to protect the dignity of persons with disabilities, including persons who desired to participate in higher education, and to defend against discrimination based on their disability (Rehabilitation Act, 1973). Despite the efforts of the act, there was little to no means to justify civil or criminal measures for disabled persons who had previously been discriminated against based on their disability (Fekete, 2013). The Education Amendments of 1974 revised Section 504 to make clear the protections afforded to persons with disabilities and extended all civil rights protections included in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The focus of the act was for inclusion of students’ placement, to the maximum extent, with non-disabled peers (Education Amendments, 1974).

Furthermore, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibited discrimination based on disabilities in all institutions that received federal funding, which included most colleges and universities, and mandated the following for PSE settings: (a) access to facilities and activities, (b) admission policies and practices that do not discriminate based on disability, (c) testing procedures with appropriate accommodations, and (d) provision of auxiliary aids and services (Rehabilitation Act, 1973). These provisions mandated by Section 504 created opportunities for individuals with ID and developmental disabilities (DD) to access PSE; however, colleges and universities were
only in the beginning stages of learning to support such individuals, and therefore, not
many individuals with ID pursued higher education opportunities (Fekete, 2013).

**Educational Law in 1990**

In 1990, the EAHCA was renamed IDEA, and the legislation continued to gain
momentum amongst families of students with disabilities because it stood to challenge
the mindset of the mainstream student population and the expectations for students with
disabilities in typical public school classrooms (Grigal et al., 2012). Person-centered
planning, also known as people-first language, placed emphasis on the strengths of the
individual rather than dwelling on the weaknesses one might have (IDEA, 1990).

Modeled after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation
Act of 1973, the ADA (1990) prohibited any “public entity,” including institutes of
higher education (IHEs), from discrimination of enrollment based on disability.
Furthermore, it stated that the public entity must offer services in integrated settings,
where appropriate, to meet the needs of the individuals participating in the environment.
ADA recommended the use of reasonable accommodations to level the playing field for
students with disabilities to access the content through reasonable supports in order to be
successful with acquisition of knowledge. Reasonable accommodations to policies,
practices, and procedures in the learning environment do not alter the nature of the
content delivered; however, the accommodations would serve as supplementary supports
or aids that offer varied means of action, expression, and representation of the material
(ADA, 1990). What was defined as reasonable accommodations and supports for
students with ID was in alignment with the goal of ADA that placed emphasis on a
person’s capability to function in the mainstream environment instead of dwelling on the
person’s limitations (Farnham, 2011). Both ADA (1990) and IDEA (1990) placed importance on serving individuals to become independent and self-determined to achieve their dreams, and the significance of these goals continued with the reauthorization of IDEA over the next decade.

In 1997, IDEA underwent a reauthorization that included access to the general education setting to remain as the LRE so that the students were exposed to highly engaging and rigorous curriculum. These amendments were necessary in order for the IEP team to begin exploring options for students to transition after exiting secondary school. According to IDEA 1997, a student with an IEP can receive support through special education services until the semester in which he or she turns 22 years of age, if he or she was unable to complete the requirements for a high school diploma. In an effort to plan for transition into a less restrictive environment after secondary school, IEP teams needed to develop appropriate transition services and related activities to support the students entering into adulthood.

Continuous improvement for IDEA occurred in 2004 where the amendments included a renaming of the act to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). Amongst many changes to support individuals with disabilities, the improvement act recognized the need for IEP teams to not only support students with disabilities in the exploration of and preparation for transition after secondary school but also to be ready to participate in the adult setting as independent, educated, and employed individuals. In order to support the students for success in a rigorous adult environment, connection with related agencies that would support the students after secondary school was necessary (IDEIA, 2004).
The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 identified transition preparation and placed emphasis on the need for secondary schools to collaborate with PSE programs to identify needs before transition and skills necessary to be successful in PSE (Ligon, 2009). Successful collaboration between school systems will provide clarity on roles and expectations for all stakeholders. The perception of roles and expectations can become a barrier, but when clear expectations of roles are defined, this barrier can be reduced so that a healthy perception can exist (Gallinger, 2013).

**Educational Law in 2008**

In relationship to students with ID, the amendment act for ADA in 2008 proved crucial for representation of supports and access to higher education and PSE settings. The ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008 overturned several controversial court decisions where persons with varying disabilities not previously specified, such as epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, diabetes, muscular dystrophy, cancer, and intellectual disabilities, were denied protection under ADA. The ADAAA (2008) substantiated the rights of individuals suffering from limitations to major life activities including learning, reading, thinking, communicating, concentrating, and other various activities of daily life. Significant restrictions to documentation needed to substantiate a person’s disability were also lessened due to the ADAAA of 2008, thus making postsecondary settings more accessible to students with ID.

**Higher Education Access in 2008**

Currently, only a small percentage of students with ID go on to have a PSE experience after leaving secondary school (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011). HEOA (2008) included provisions that dramatically improved access to higher education for
students with ID. HEOA has created opportunities for students with ID in higher education by making financial aid available to students who participate in select programs and meet selected criteria; encouraging institutions to develop inclusive programs using the UDL framework for flexible, dynamic learning expectations; and working with neighboring secondary school districts to provide opportunities for dual-enrollment, inclusive education, and individual coursework, leading students to meaningful education and career development (ADAAA, 2008).

The UDL framework recognizes the newest advancements in brain research and how students of all learner types can optimize their learning experience (Connell et al., 1997). UDL principles include the teacher as a facilitator of the environment, who engages the students in purposeful activities to motivate the learners, presents the content in multiple ways so that the learners understand what they are learning, and encourages the learners to express what the learning has meant to them through meaningful experience (CAST, n.d.). Colleges and universities that have developed program options for students with ID, according to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education, have embedded the principles of UDL to ensure success for the students who participate in the PSE setting, such as an approved CTP (Weir et al., 2013). According to Hartz (2014), the principles of UDL are easily transferrable to PSE settings because the strategies of collaborative planning, peer mentoring, project-based learning, and teacher-facilitated learning enable students with ID to engage with the academic content and demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways. In PSE settings, UDL allows individuals with ID to explore their learning
environment with materials that are adapted to the unique needs of the learners in order to make the learning objective accessible and equitable (Connell et al., 1997).

In summary of the evolution of laws that supported students with ID, the past 40 years showed a significant change in inclusive mindset regarding the settings where students with ID were offered an education and how students with ID were included in general setting as contributors to society. The momentum for inclusive settings all the way through higher education gained national backing through the HEOA of 2008 and opened the door for funding in higher education to include more students with ID as part of the diverse populations on college campuses. Some preliminary evidence offered by the research showed the progression of law for inclusive settings for students with ID; however, there has been little research conducted to gain insight from the students regarding their participation in PSE settings and its impact on adulthood.

**Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students With Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID)**

The Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston received a grant to fund the first national coordinating center that would serve as the central hub or information highway, referred to as Think College (Grigal & Hart, 2010). According to Grigal et al. (2013), due to the Think College coordinating center being the first of its kind, the development of resources, networking, and management of the system took significant time to create, but the goal was to generate a common set of standards that colleges would use to produce high-quality PSE programs for students with ID.
The Think College (n.d.) coordination center developed a set of quality indicators and standards for IHEs to consider when developing programs to support students with ID in transitioning from high school into a postsecondary setting. Think College aimed to break down barriers to higher education for students with ID because often advocates of students with ID attending PSE were criticized as a “waste of time” because the students with ID were not earning a traditional degree (Grigal & Hart, 2010; Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011). Think College challenged the traditional nature of a college experience and described college as an opportunity for students with ID to create social networks, be exposed to academia, and gain vocational skills to be successful in employment. As for students without a disability, the college experience is not one-size-fits-all, as should be considered the same for students with ID who wish to extend their learning in an age-appropriate environment. With this mindset, Think College confronted those who stated that serving students with ID in PSE was a waste of time and defined a college experience as an opportunity to “explore, define, and redefine personal goals related to adult learning, employment, and social networking” (Grigal & Hart, 2010, p. xiii).

Funding for students with ID was included through the HEOA of 2008, and a total of 27 IHEs in 23 states agreed to include students with ID in an inclusive educational environment that would support their transition into adulthood (Grigal et al., 2013). Students with ID in IHEs would participate in academics and instruction, social involvement, vocational experiences, and activities to support independent living. All experiences would include learning alongside nondisabled peers in an effort to model their behavior after those without disabilities (Think College, n.d.).
New Label in 2010

Students with ID used to be labeled as mentally retarded (MR), but in 2010, Public Law 111-256, known as Rosa’s Law, changed all previous terminology referring to students with MR to the new term of ID. Before 2010, students who showed significant deficits in cognitive function, academic delays, and social impairments were labeled as retarded, and the stigma that followed the label left these individuals feeling inadequate and ill-equipped to function as members of society. However, Rosa’s Law stood to change the stigma for individuals with ID, and with the support of IDEIA, individuals with ID were to be seen for their contribution to society and not for their difference in cognitive function (Plotkin, 2011).

Intellectual Disability

As defined according to the HEOA (2008), ID refers to students with significant learning, cognitive, and other conditions that, without strong systems of support for accommodations and modifications, would make it difficult for them to perform at the same rate as a nondisabled peer. These students require significant planning and collaboration with stakeholders in order to ensure a balanced plan for progress. This includes students who (a) take alternative state assessments, (b) exit secondary education with a certificate of completion instead of a typical high school diploma, and (c) qualify to receive a FAPE until they reach 22 years of age (Hart, 2006).

According to Farnham (2011), in recognition of students with ID who desire to extend their learning in higher education settings, it was important to understand how their lived experiences in higher education contributed to their success in competitive employment as adults and their overall independence as contributors to society.
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Students with ID deserve to be offered an education in the LRE where learning occurs alongside nondisabled peers of the same chronological age (IDEIA, 2004). LRE refers to the concept that students with disabilities deserve to be educated in a typical setting the same as what would be offered to nondisabled students but with the necessary accommodations to level the playing field of access to the core curriculum at a pace that enables each individual student to master individual goals with the content. Students with ID will matriculate into the adult world just as students without disabilities will be expected to engage in adult learning and adult employment upon graduation from secondary school (Farnham, 2011). Students with ID who have been offered an individualized education within the classroom setting where they can model their behavior after that expected of same-aged peers without disabilities have shown greater success in postsecondary settings, including a greater likelihood of maintaining paid employment in adulthood (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011).

Despite one’s ability or disability, the opportunity to explore the mainstream environment where those without disabilities are functioning is the goal of LRE (IDEIA, 2004). In order to learn to function in the mainstream environment, students with ID need to be included within the setting in which they will be expected to compete for employment. In order to afford students with ID the chance to gain the necessary skills to become contributing citizens, they will need access to PSE settings to receive adequate training, because there is little to no opportunity in secondary school settings for students with ID, ages 18-22, to take classes of personal interest or gain insight on a specific career area that would not have been of interest prior to taking a class in a specific area at
the college level (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011). It was crucial to collect the voices and experiences of current students with ID who participated in PSE settings to determine the significance of their involvement as they worked to become successful citizens (Farnham, 2011).

**ID and PSE**

Prior to exiting secondary school, students with ID are offered a FAPE in order to facilitate the transition into adulthood as successful citizens (IDEA, 1990). It was important to discuss how students with ID are educated through secondary school prior to entering the adult world and accessing a postsecondary environment. PSE includes educational opportunities for students after the secondary school level (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Participation in PSE has proven to contribute to the overall success of a student with ID in the areas of employment, community participation, and independent living (Grigal & Hart, 2010; Weir et al., 2013). A review of postsecondary options for students with ID over the last 4 decades provides an understanding of how students with ID participate in school settings through the age of 22, provides a glimpse of the options that have existed for students with ID in postsecondary settings from the 1970s to current times, and identifies the need for continued transformational change in how PSE settings are offering programs to support students with ID in higher education.

**ID in School Settings**

Students with ID entering the adult world are in need of training and education in a higher education experience in order to be equipped to enter the work world and survive in competitive employment, especially when they are competing for jobs where nondisabled peers typically dominate the competition (Farnham, 2011; Furgang, 2013;
Grigal et al., 2012). Students with ID historically have had different levels of services within elementary, middle, and secondary schools, and the opportunity for access to a PSE experience was limited before the HEOA of 2008. Individual support of students with ID prior to postsecondary options differs in various school settings across the United States; however, IDEIA (2004) demands that school districts design programs and opportunities for students with ID to be exposed to the general education curriculum at a pace that they can manage. Understanding the history of options for PSE, and the options for services, emphasizes the meaning behind the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE as related to this study.

**History of PSE Options**

Students leaving secondary school are encouraged to seek higher education and training to function in the adult world. Understanding how the options for PSE have developed over time will uncover the richness of the lived experiences of students who participated. It is also important to discuss the evolution of options available to students with ID over the last 4 decades in order to make connections with the success that the students describe in adulthood as a direct result of their participation in PSE.

**PSE in the 1970s.** The 1970s were flooded with social movements and legislation to support students with ID to be educated in typical environments so that they had access to opportunities similar to those of their nondisabled peers (Fekete, 2013). Educational activists asked probing questions to seek the underlying pedagogy of colleges that claimed to offer educational experiences to students with ID to uncover any hidden agenda of the colleges that were the trailblazers for program development for students with ID in PSE. One might wonder why, at a time during a significant movement for the
rights of students with ID, such activists challenged the integrity of the colleges that rose to the occasion to develop inclusive settings for students with ID, but the activists’ main goal was to ensure that the colleges that stepped up to the challenge did so for the right reasons and not for individual notoriety or selfish gain. According to a review of literature conducted by Madaus in 2000, after World War II and leading up to the early 1970s, there were less than one dozen university programs that offered support to veterans who had suffered significant trauma in the war and required major supports in order to reintegrate into society, but through other universities’ acknowledgement of those veterans who would not be considered individuals with ID, it was difficult to decipher exactly what kind of learner was being recruited for learning in higher education.

**PSE in the 1980s.** Although in the 1980s service options for students with ID were on the rise, the same results were not occurring with the employment rates for persons with disabilities (Farnham, 2011). Throughout the decade, legislation such as the Job Training Partnership Act of 1982, the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1983 and 1986, and the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education and Technology Act of 1984 allocated funds to support vocational school-to-work programs, job partnerships, and on-the-job training through supported employment, but even with all of the funding and resources that were being provided, students with ID were not sustaining in competitive work environments (Neubert, Moon, Grigal, & Redd, 2001).

Colleges and universities worked to take current educational programs for nondisabled students and modify them to meet the needs of students with significant disabilities in order to be in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of
1973; however, the colleges and universities failed to identify barriers that would impact access to the postsecondary environment, such as eligibility criteria, a lack of funding, and a willingness of the staff to include students with significant disabilities in the typical classroom environment (Neubert et al., 2001). The body of literature on PSE of students with ID during the 1980s strongly indicates that there was a lack of ownership from site personnel to support students with ID in PSE environments (Thoma et al., 2011). In fact, several years later, a national survey was conducted that included over 200 individuals from all collective states who were surveyed about the type of services offered to students with ID, training for faculty on supporting students with ID, and attitude and policy barriers related to individuals with ID. Evidence from the study showed that less than 1% of the population of students served were students with ID, and although the participants stated that colleges should have a role in supporting students with ID, there was little to no development of programs for students with ID (Neubert et al., 2001).

Overall, the literature in the 1980s emphasized the relatedness of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) and colleges’ and universities’ response to comply with actions to provide opportunities for students with ID in an academic setting. However, the literature suggested that fewer programs existed in the 1980s than in the 1970s, but this was due to the initial implementation of the EAHCA (1975) and the refining of programs to consider the needs of staff and students (Neubert et al., 2001). During the 1980s, most of the expansion of services came as a result of outside agencies, case law, or requests from parents/families advocating for their students with ID, but as time progressed into the 1990s, many of the program need changes were due to the increasing
requests from the students with disabilities to access a general education environment and learn alongside their nondisabled peers (Neubert et al., 2001).

**PSE in the 1990s.** Evidence from a review of literature conducted by Neubert et al. (2001) indicated that that public schools in the 1990s were complying with the demands of IDEA (1990) and revisions to IDEA (1997) to include transition plans for students with disabilities to be prepared for adult transition upon graduation from high school. A further review of literature conducted by Thoma et al. (2011) explained that in response to the federal mandates included in IDEA (1990) and the 1997 revisions to the act, public schools divided program options for students considered adults ages 18 to 22 and those still on a comprehensive high school campus up to the age of 18.

The distinction between the two programs in the 1990s was important due to the need for individuals with ID to have access to opportunities on college campuses and opportunities for participation in regular college courses with nondisabled peers, versus the programs that simply removed students with ID ages 18-21 from the comprehensive high school campus and placed them in an alternative setting other than a college campus (Neubert et al., 2001). Both programs honored the consideration of age-appropriate settings for individuals with ID; however, the setting in which the students with ID were placed after being removed from the high school campus did not allow for students with ID to interact with nondisabled peers in an academic environment. In an effort to bridge the gap for students with ID who were serviced in an alternative setting but not on a college campus, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) of 1994 mandated that states create transition plans for students with ID to shift to education- or employment-based postsecondary settings (Farnham, 2011).
STWOA (1994) offered grant money for secondary schools to set up transition options for students with ID and other disabilities to gain vocational experiences and ease the transition between leaving high school and entering into the adult world (Flexer, Baer, Luft, & Simmons, 2005). Secondary schools were challenged to include rigorous curriculum that was career-based and to place importance on matching students’ interests with goals for educational and career exploration that would lead to participation in higher education settings where their skills would be further developed (Flexer et al., 2005). Between 1995 and 2000, 13 PSE options had been identified in Maryland (Grigal, Neubert, & Moon, 2001). These specific opportunities were for students between the ages of 18 and 21 who were identified as having an ID. Overall, the decade of the 1990s was filled with increasing opportunities for students with ID in PSE, and the trend continued into the next decade (Grigal & Hart, 2010).

**PSE in the 2000s.** A review of the literature from multiple sources from the first decade of the 21st century showed that increased attention was given to determining the changes in PSE setting description, degree of participation of students with ID in PSE, and evidence of improved outcomes for students with ID who completed a PSE program (Neubert et al., 2001; Thoma et al., 2011). Overwhelmingly, the reviews described PSE settings that served students ages 18-21 in dual-enrollment programs and as independent college students, but very few studies have attempted to determine participant outcomes or highlight students’ voices after participating in a PSE environment (Thoma et al., 2011). Multiple sources focused on strategies useful in PSE environments, such as consideration of UDL and quality indicators for implementing PSE programs.
UDL created opportunities for students with ID to be successful in multiple environments, including PSE, but equally important for PSE settings to consider when creating programs is the principles of a CTP. Specifically, students with ID, ages 18-22, who desire to extend their learning in an age-appropriate setting must be enrolled in an approved CTP in order to qualify for additional grants or the Federal Work Study program. In order to keep up with requirements for opportunities in PSE for students with ID, institutions of higher learning need to increase the number of program options so that the students have access to an equitable learning environment (HEOA, 2008). This, therefore, warranted a deeper review of the literature on students with ID who access PSE.

The focus of the literature review was to identify and substantiate the need for students with ID to be included in higher education opportunities to provide a foundation of skills necessary to be successful in the adult world and within the employment community (Grigal et al., 2005; Thoma et al., 2011). For example, in addition to long-term economic benefits associated with higher education degrees and certificates, participation in higher education environments has been associated with a more active lifestyle, development of peer relationships, increased self-esteem, and a strong connection with democratic institutions (Flexer et al., 2005; Thoma et al., 2011). Continued review of the literature supported the need for hearing the authentic stories of the students who have participated in PSE in an effort to understand its impact on employment and overall independence.

As the need for expansion of PSE environments for students with ID continued, so did the legislation that supported the need. In 2002, President George W. Bush’s
commission on special education continued its focus on PSE outcomes for students with disabilities through the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002). According to Strieker et al. (2010), and in alignment with NCLB (2002), the “university setting provides opportunities for students with ID to engage in authentic learning experiences with their non-disabled peers who will ultimately become the next generation of leaders” (p. 4).

According to Thoma et al. (2011), a review of the literature from 2001-2010 warranted 37 author contributions related to PSE for students with ID, and the discoveries made were referenced from the literature review conducted by Neubert et al. (2001), who made their determination based on the changes in PSE options from the 1990s to 2001. Over the last decade, seminal authors who have published journal articles related to PSE and ID have included Neubert (coauthored seven articles), Grigal (coauthored six articles), Moon (authored five articles), and Hart (authored four articles; Thoma et al., 2011). The next section provides a description of the evolution of PSE programs in 2010 through the support of the TPSID grant.

First TPSID Grant in 2010

Jones, Weir, and Hart (2011) noted, “Changes to federal legislation, and the proliferation of initiatives to support students with ID in college and university settings, would not have happened without the advocacy efforts of students with ID and their families” (p. 1). Opportunities for students with ID in PSE have increased over the past several years, mostly due to the response to local needs and justified through legislation. However, until recently, there has not been a framework for development, and as a result, programs were developed in isolation with little to no accountability or practices for sustainability (Weir et al., 2013).
Due to the legislation of the HEOA of 2008, a new type of PSE program was created for students with ID called a CTP. In order for students with ID who participate in PSE settings to be eligible for certain forms of financial aid, there must be specific guidelines followed as defined by CTPs and HEOA (2008). In 2010, HEOA authorized funding for a comprehensive TPSID as a model demonstration project across the United States. A national coordination center for these TPSID model projects was awarded to Think College. Think College was born out of the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston (Weir et al., 2013).

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), the purpose of TPSID was to provide grants to IHEs to enable them to create high-quality, inclusive model CTPs and PSE programs for students with ID. Over $9 million was allocated for 27 colleges and universities across the United States in 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). TPSID projects would establish the following in model CTPs and PSE programs:

1. serve students with intellectual disabilities;
2. provide individual supports and services for the academic and social inclusion of students with [ID] in academic courses, extracurricular activities, and other aspects of the institution of higher education’s regular postsecondary program;
3. with respect to the students with [ID] participating in the model program, provides a focus on—
   (A) academic enrichment;
   (B) socialization;
   (C) independent living skills, including self-advocacy skills; and
(D) integrated work experiences and career skills that lead to gainful employment;

(4) integrate person-centered planning in the development of the course of study for each student with [ID] participating in the model program;

(5) participate with the coordinating center established under section 777(b) in the evaluation of the model program;

The cooperative agreement is authorized to operate the coordinating center under Sec 777(b) of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965, as amended (HEA)–Part D–Programs to Provide Students with Disabilities with a Quality Higher Education. The purpose of the five-year cooperative agreement is to establish a coordinating center for institutions of higher education that offer inclusive comprehensive transition and postsecondary programs for students with [ID], including institutions funded under the [TPSID] Program. . . .

(6) partner with one or more local educational agencies to support students with [ID] participating in the model program who are still eligible for special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, including the use of funds available under part B of such Act to support the participation of such students in the model program;

(7) plan for the sustainability of the model program after the end of the grant period; and

(8) create and offers a meaningful credential for students with [ID] upon the completion of the model program. (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, n.p.)
While the data collected from the TPSID model programs were vast, so were the experiences of the students with ID who were participating in them, and it was difficult to gather a sense of what was occurring on the grounds of the PSE campuses. Think College conducted six site visits in 2013 to bring detail and nuance to what is known about programs serving students with ID. The sites were selected based on a survey that was conducted in 2009 by Think College, and the goal of the site visits was to highlight the lived experiences of those staff members and students who made the programs successful (Weir et al., 2013). However, according to Weir et al. (2013), limited student experiences were gathered, and further research should be conducted to substantiate the stories and outcomes of the students with ID in PSE to determine how IHEs would better meet the needs of their diverse student populations.

**Planning for Transition to PSE**

IDEIA (2004) identified the individual transition plan (ITP) as the driving force of the IEP document to prepare students for post-high school success. For students with ID to be prepared for postsecondary settings, including a college environment, the students must explore an interest, ability, and needs as related to the educational, employment, and independent settings available (IDEIA, 2004). According to Grigal and Hart (2010), students with ID need to have an understanding of how a college experience might impact them, their community, and the competitive workforce. The evidence from other major studies included in Neubert et al.’s (2001) review of literature indicated that students with ID and other DD require specialized training for success in higher education settings and ultimately to be gainfully employed. Therefore, it is essential that
secondary school programs for students with ID begin to prepare the students for higher education and competitive employment through the use of the ITP (IDEIA, 2004).

For students with ID between the ages of 18 and 22, awareness of local programs that offer postsecondary experiences should be discussed before exiting public school. The teaching efforts need to focus on what the students know and are capable of doing well in a postsecondary setting rather than just considering PSE coursework as a renewal of information (Grigal et al., 2001). Before exiting the secondary setting, students with ID should be enrolled in classes focused on access to grade-level content with the appropriate modifications for life skill relevance. While participating in a general education content class, students with ID may be offered and encouraged to engage fully in the content; however, the lens through which the students are evaluated is based on their ability. For students who remain on the secondary campus until the age of 22, later years’ coursework should include a variety of self-determination, independent living, vocational training, and community participation components to facilitate the transition from secondary to postsecondary settings (Grigal et al., 2001).

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) initiated transition grants across the United States, and in 2003, the federal government had funded over 500 grant projects in 46 states (Ligon, 2009). Options for students with ID included community experience, vocational-technical colleges, and other various forms of adult education. The goal of the projects was to identify skills needed to be successful in postsecondary settings, with employment being the highest ranked outcome. PSE opportunities were encouraged for some, but they were not considered the focus. In order to facilitate the transition process, once skill sets had been identified, secondary school teams needed to
complete a summary of performance (SOP; IDEIA, 2004) that would function as a bridging document from the secondary education setting to postsecondary settings. This inclusive ideology supported the belief that all students should have the opportunity to maximize their full potential through a PSE experience (Gallinger, 2013). Although IDEA 2004 required that strengths and preferences were identified in the SOP, transition planning was initially part of the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 (Kardos, 2011).

According to research conducted by Shaw and Dukes in 2013, there was an increasing need to identify strengths and preferences for postsecondary options, and it was imperative that a coordinated set of evidence-based practices be developed to support the transition into postsecondary settings. This was supported by an analysis of variance of the National Longitudinal Transition Study–2 (NLTS2; Newman et al., 2009) where postsecondary outcomes for students with significant disabilities often fell within the category of sheltered workshops or adult day programs and did not include exploring or accessing PSE (Newman et al., 2011). The research has suggested that perceptions of students with significant disabilities, as well as the attitudes of the providers who supported them in the transition process, affected what they thought of as an appropriate postsecondary experience for the individual students (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011).

Newman et al. (2011) recognized that not all students have a desire to continue in education as a postsecondary option, but it was important to note that according to the NLTS2, one of the highest predictors of postsecondary employment success was related to positive job coaching that the students had participated in through employment-related vocational experiences prior to exiting secondary school. As described by Joshi, Bouck, and Maeda (2012), this is extremely important for secondary schools to consider when
deciding between an inclusive versus mainstreamed model for students with significant disabilities. In order for students with ID to be competitive in the current job market, they need to receive training in the community to support vocational development.

Equally as important as on-the-job training are educational experiences with same-age, nondisabled peers because these experiences set the expectation that students with ID will model their actions after what they see their peers doing (Joshi et al., 2012).

For those students who desire to continue their education in PSE, the role of the IEP team and development of the ITP is crucial to planning for a successful transition from secondary school to higher education. In secondary school, students with ID are least likely to have college indicated as a goal for postsecondary school, partially because those working with the students are unaware of the level of supports that college might offer for students with ID to be successful in a highly academic environment (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011; Grigal et al., 2012).

Despite the perception of students’ abilities, students with ID deserve to have access to a rigorous environment where they can learn alongside their nondisabled peers. Secondary school must remain in line with current legislation such as IDEIA (2004) in which Indicator 13 states that the ITP for students age 16 and above will state goals and identify transition services to reasonably enable the students to meet the postsecondary goals (Grigal & Hart, 2010). According to the NLTS2 (2009), “90% of adults with ID were not employed; fewer than 15% participated in post-secondary education; and over 700,000 people with ID lived with parents aged 60 or over” (as cited in Grigal & Hart, 2010, p. xi). In order to change these statistics, students with ID need specific goals identified in the ITP in the areas of college preparedness, career awareness, and
independent living in order to be successful in transitioning into PSE (Getzel & Wehman, 2005).

**College Preparedness**

According to Indicator 13 of IDEIA (2004), students with disabilities, including those with ID, need to be prepared for a postsecondary setting once they exit secondary school. This preparation for a postsecondary environment would include exploration of higher education or vocational training programs that will prepare students with ID with the necessary skills to become gainfully employed. Being gainfully employed requires knowledge and targeted education in the field of interest for the students so that they have the opportunity to learn the necessary skills to compete for higher paying jobs, not just entry-level, minimum wage positions (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011). Furthermore, Indicator 14 of IDEIA (2004) requires secondary schools to track data on the outcomes of students with disabilities, including ID, after they have exited secondary school and are 1 year into postsecondary settings.

**Career Awareness**

In order for students with ID to compete in the employment realm, they must possess 21st-century workforce skills (Grigal & Hart, 2010), which will require secondary and postsecondary settings to merge policies in an effort to better prepare young adults to pursue meaningful work in the 21st-century workplace. These skills include being innovative, collaborative, effective communicators, creative, and critical thinkers (Shaw & Dukes, 2013). Building career awareness for students with ID in secondary school involves a highly motivated team approach with integrated transition services through the ITP. Students with ID need to explore career options through
multiple means of learning similar to the practices of UDL, such as exploring jobs available in their local community, job shadowing, having on-the-job coaching, and participating in multiple short-term vocational experiences to discover their hidden ability (Grigal & Hart, 2010).

**Independent Living**

As of 2009, 700,000 people with ID still lived with parents age 60 or older (Grigal & Hart, 2010). The point is to give students with ID who desire to be independent the opportunity to learn the skills, take on the responsibility, and fulfill the expectation to do so. If students with ID are not expected to strive for independence, then many of them will find alternative supports to remain status quo, unless they are exposed to adult-learning opportunities such as planning for meals, balancing their budget, paying bills, navigating the transportation system to get to appointments or to work, and being actively involved in the community (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011; Hartz, 2014).

**Pursuing Transition Opportunities in the LRE**

PSE has been shown to be advantageous for employment, community participation, independence, individual choice, and quality-of-life outcomes for people with and without ID (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2013; Thoma et al., 2012; Thoma et al., 2011; Zafft, Hart, & Zimbrich, 2004). This section provides substantial rationale for the increase in student enrollment in PSE settings and discusses the rationale for education equity through the two most recent pieces of legislation that support students with ID in postsecondary settings: ADA and HEOA. In order to support students with ID in PSE and ensure they have a higher likelihood of success in competitive employment, research
is needed to gather the stories of the student experience so that PSE programs are meeting the needs of the individual learners with ID.

Overall, the desired outcomes in life for students with and without disabilities include achieving competitive employment, learning about a topic of interest, becoming self-motivated and self-dependent, and maintaining lifelong relationships with others (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Pursuing options in PSE, being part of campus life, and learning to navigate a world of high expectations will lead to the development of 21st-century citizens—including students with ID. Through PSE, students with ID will exit with career goals, be connected to adult systems and services, have increased self-determination skills, and be better able to articulate their needs in a diverse society (Gallinger, 2013; Grigal & Hart, 2010).

Opportunities for transition into the adult world must be supported and encouraged in the most natural setting—a setting in which the students experience life alongside same-age, nondisabled peers in order to have an adequate model of behavior to replicate. Educational experiences for students with ID, age 18 and older, should be anchored in the community setting and authentic settings such as age-appropriate college environments where they are more likely to acquire critical skills in academics, employment, community living, recreation, and independence (Rogan, Updike, Chesterfield, & Savage, 2014). Students with ID who have participated in PSE have been found to be more likely to have a paid job as well as higher earnings (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011; Zafft et al., 2004), and legislation in 2008 gained momentum for students with ID to access postsecondary settings.
ADAAA of 2008

Originally, the language of ADA (1990) was limiting in its mandates regarding persons with disabilities, and after two Supreme Court cases where the legislation language was challenged, ADAAA (2008) was recreated to include a broader and more inclusive definition of disabilities protected under ADA (Furgang, 2013). Where previous ADA (1990) language stated that the “limitations must be considered in a mitigated state” (sec. 504) for what constitutes a disability, now according to ADAAA (2008), those with a “substantially limiting or major life activity” (sec. 504) are protected under the act. The new legislation wording included those with ID and significantly impacted PSE settings because the enrollment process could not discriminate against these students seeking higher education experiences (ADAAA, 2008), and a growing number of students have sought access to PSE, allowing them to experience adult learning firsthand (Grigal & Hart, 2010).

The ADAAA of 2008 required accommodations for students with disabilities to access PSE programs. However, these accommodations were through Section 504 and did not provide a modified means of instruction or intensive intervention for students with significant disabilities (Kardos, 2011). Section 504 of the ADAAA (2008) defined accommodations as adaptations for individuals with disabilities that would allow them to participate in the curriculum successfully. For example, a student with a visual impairment could access accommodations under Section 504 such as large-print books or materials in braille, if required. Students with ID may require more significant accommodations than a traditional college-level course can provide (Kardos, 2011).
HEOA of 2008

President Obama signed the HEOA (2008), which, amongst other issues, included creating model demonstration programs that would support the involvement of students with ID in PSE settings. The act formally recognized PSE as specialized programs in IHEs as well as dual enrollment for students with ID who are still covered under IDEIA yet desire to participate in education with age-appropriate peers simultaneously (Thoma et al., 2012). President Obama continued to emphasize the importance for Americans to extend their education beyond secondary school in his 2009 State of the Union address:

In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity; it is a prerequisite. Right now, three-quarters of the fastest growing occupations require more than a high school diploma. And yet, just over half of our citizens have that level of education. We have one of the highest high school dropout rates of any industrialized nation, and half of the students who begin college never finish. . . . But it is the responsibility of every citizen to participate in [college]. So tonight I ask every American to commit to at least 1 year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a 4-year school, vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma. (as cited in Thoma et al., 2012, p. 1122)

President Obama emphasized the heightened need for Americans to engage in higher education opportunities because it would encourage a stronger nation through innovation and entrepreneurship. His encouragement was inclusive of individuals of all
abilities, including ID, and his support of those who strive to be lifelong learners created opportunities for individuals with ID to have access to higher education (Thoma et al., 2012).

Beyond the persuasion from the President of the United States urging all Americans to take a vested interest in their continued education, the HEOA (2008) included new provisions for rules regarding financial aid for students with ID, grants, and accommodations, but it also contained strict guidelines for students with ID to be eligible for financial aid: (a) students must have exited high school and cannot be receiving services under IDEA; (b) students must have an ID as defined by HEOA (2008):

(A) [a student] with . . . cognitive [disability] impairment, characterized by significant limitations in—

(i) intellectual and cognitive functioning; and

(ii) adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills; and

(B) who is currently, or was formerly, eligible for a free appropriate public education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (sec. 760[2])

(c) students and their families must demonstrate financial need; and (d) students must attend an approved CTP as part of the TPSID grant.

A review of multiple studies concluded that the HEOA (2008) created a pathway for IHEs to build inclusive programs for students with ID based on the needs of the students and the communities in which the programs were created. It shaped the platform for how the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education was created and is the bedrock of CTPs to date (Grigal & Hart, 2010; HEOA,
Grigal and Hart (2010) concluded that the standards for inclusive higher education were critical for colleges to use when designing programs for students with ID so that the students would have the opportunity to engage in learning alongside nondisabled peers and have access to grants and financial aid. In order for future researchers to examine the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE, it will be essential for them to have a framework of common language that describes what a CTP offers and how the experiences of the students were enriched because of the attention to detail in the framework standards.

**Think College Framework for Higher Education**

Think College was an initiative out of the University of Massachusetts Boston’s Institute for Community Inclusion, and its purpose was to provide a network of professional practice and research surrounding the promotion of PSE programs for students with ID and DD (Grigal & Hart, 2010). The standards, quality indicators, and benchmarks of Think College reflect perspectives from professionals in the field of PSE who are knowledgeable about serving students with ID and DD. The standards were developed through funding from the National Institute on Disability Rehabilitation and Research in order to create inclusive, academic, and valid standards that other IHEs could use to develop and sustain programs for students with ID (Grigal & Hart, 2010; Grigal et al., 2013).

There were eight standards total with 88 quality benchmarks that were reviewed through a rigorous peer review by a professional panel, ultimately utilizing a Delphi process to obtain consensus on the opinions of the experts. The study was used to validate the standards that would serve as a common language for professionals to use to
develop, refine, and research programs for students with ID and DD (Furgang, 2013; Grigal & Hart, 2010; Grigal et al., 2013). The Think College standards stood to create a course of study that was developed through person-centered planning and was focused on supporting the employment goals of students with ID once they exited from PSE (Thoma et al., 2012).

The Think College standards, quality indicators, and benchmarks provided a philosophical approach for planning and assessing practice, and they aligned with the definition of a CTP for students with ID as outlined in the HEOA (2008). They were designed to support innovation and to serve not as a prescription for program development but more so a description of best practices in the effort to create authentic, inclusive higher education experiences (Grigal & Hart, 2010; Hartz, 2014).

**Standard 1: Academic Access**

The first standard addressed the issue related to inclusive, high-quality academic access to a wide range of courses attended by nondisabled students. It included three quality indicators and 15 benchmarks that assessed course participation and skills for lifelong learning (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011).

**Standard 2: Career Development**

The second standard addressed the critical aspect of career development that would lead to integrated, competitive employment upon completion of the PSE program. It included one quality indicator and seven benchmarks (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011).

**Standard 3: Campus Membership**

The third standard addressed the importance of campus life and campus membership through related clubs, sports, or social events, which should include access
to facilities and technology to support learning. It included one quality indicator and three benchmarks to evaluate how the students perceive their development in the college campus community (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011).

**Standard 4: Self-Determination**

The fourth standard addressed the development of self-determination and a sense of personal goals while participating in PSE. It included three quality indicators and 15 benchmarks to dig deep into how the PSE program encourages self-advocacy, person-centered planning, and self-directed learning (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011).

**Standard 5: Alignment With College Systems and Practices**

The fifth standard addressed the alignment between the college systems and perceived outcomes for the students with ID to establish authentic experiences for the students to engage in as a critical part of learning. It included five quality indicators and 21 benchmarks to look at student credentials, academic progress, involvement of college faculty, and program policies and procedures (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011).

**Standard 6: Coordination and Collaboration**

The sixth standard addressed how the various stakeholders would facilitate coordination with other departments and develop partnerships with outside agencies on behalf of the students with ID. It included two quality indicators and nine benchmarks for the assessment of internal and external partners (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011).

**Standard 7: Sustainability**

The seventh standard addressed how the college planned to maintain the PSE program for students with ID through diverse funding sources to ensure fiscal health and
future development through a varied advisory team. It included two quality indicators and eight benchmarks (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011).

**Standard 8: Ongoing Evaluation**

The eighth standard addressed the necessary part of ongoing development and reflection of practice through standard evaluation from multiple stakeholders. It included one quality indicator and six benchmarks to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and of ongoing evaluation (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011).

**Colleges Upholding the Standards Through Quality Review**

The six IHEs selected to participate in the review by Weir et al. (2013) were Western Carolina University, a small state university in rural North Carolina; Taft College, a small community college in Central California; Keuka College, a small 4-year college in upstate New York; University of Kentucky and Northern Kentucky University, two state universities in central and northern Kentucky; and Highline Community College, a large community college south of Seattle, Washington. The six sites selected were part of the TPSID model CTP and had aligned their programs according to the Think College standards, quality indicators, and benchmarks.

Figure 1 identifies the eight standards for IHEs to serve as a guideline for creating inclusive college experiences for students with ID.

Conclusions of the site visits indicated promising philosophies and practices in PSE programs for students with ID in the United States. The purpose was to capture a more descriptive picture of the happenings on the college campuses through implementation of the eight standards. According to the data gathered from the six site visits, six philosophies emerged as promising for continued development of PSE
programs: faculty engagement and interest in diversity, reciprocity of benefit, acceptance of college peers, use of student mentors, community partnerships, and continuous quality improvement (Weir et al., 2013).

The impact of faculty engagement with students with ID proved to be powerful in terms of transfer of positive or negative attitudes to others on the PSE campus (Grigal et al., 2013; Weir et al., 2013). The faculty members who remained positive translated their thoughts of students’ experiences as a form of diversity, and those views demonstrated a good match for the college and positively impacted the rest of the college community. Likewise, the reciprocity of benefit to staff, faculty, students, and administration affirmed that students with ID deserved an equal place on the campus and acknowledged the benefit to the college as whole of having them there. The expectation of the college
community was that everyone contributes to the campus and that each student has a role in the development of the community and the vision of the college (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011; Weir et al., 2013).

Development of the community was the responsibility of every member on the college campus, and nondisabled students felt compelled to support the desires for higher education from students with ID because they were motivated by their passion and work ethic in the classes they shared with students with ID. Faculty members mentioned that nondisabled students often worked harder on assignments when they saw the level of effort that the students with ID put into the coursework (Weir et al., 2013).

Peer mentorship emerged out of shared courses with nondisabled peers and students with ID. Mentors were used as natural supports in the environment because they were accessible and willing to participate, and the phenomenon of perceived ability for a student with ID was challenged and outcast once the mentors had ample time to see the capability and determination of the students with ID (Grigal et al., 2012; Weir et al., 2013). According to Hafner, Moffatt, and Kisa (2011), a 4-year liberal arts college offers a PSE program called Cutting-Edge to students with ID and DD. Cutting-Edge students attend undergraduate courses, reside in student housing, and engage in student life events with their nondisabled peers. They also participate in community experiences, vocational training, and social gatherings. Peer mentors are paid to support students by offering tutoring and acting as life coaches, but many peers in the study expressed that a friendship grew beyond the mentorship, and they expressed the value in learning by giving to others (Hafner et al., 2011).
Community experiences lead to community partnerships with businesses and external entities that would be impacted by individuals with ID upon graduation from the PSE program once they ultimately enter into competitive employment. When the PSE programs took an interest in the needs of the external agencies and businesses when considering the skills students needed to be employable, the partnerships between the IHEs and businesses grew stronger (Weir et al., 2013; Weir et al., 2010/2011), and the students who became products of the PSE programs were more successful in the workplace because they had targeted training.

Finally, the review of the six TPSID programs revealed that continuous quality improvement led to more productive outcomes for both the students and the communities into which the students matriculated. The focus remained on increasing inclusive opportunities with academic coursework, activities to participate in typical college life, and partnerships with peer mentors to facilitate learning alongside nondisabled peers (Gallinger, 2013; Weir et al., 2013). The key to progress is a commitment to continuous improvement through purposeful reflection and review of data collected based on the eight standards for building quality PSE programs as well as further research in gathering the lived experiences of those students with ID in PSE to determine if student outcomes were in alignment with the anticipated goals set at the beginning of the programs. Without reflection, one will be unable to build on innovative practices for higher education (Weir et al., 2013).

**Literature Review Gap**

According to Furgang (2013), the evidence from two major studies conducted between 2008 and 2009 that reviewed the eight Think College standards overwhelmingly
concluded that PSE programs for students with ID were offering academic courses, training opportunities, campus membership, and independent living training; however, the research did not cite the perception of lived experiences from the students who participated and how their experiences after PSE affected their employment status or adult life in general.

**Student Experiences in PSE Models**

This section identifies four models of PSE with embedded experiences of the students who participated in those settings and the impact it had on the communities around them. It is important to understand what experiences have been documented by students with ID in the four models in order to gain an understanding of what the students see as meaningful experiences, what accommodations have helped them to be successful, and what barriers they face. The existing research on PSE for students with ID has provided detailed descriptions of characteristics of activities and course offerings, but it has not allowed researchers or practitioners to determine whether the student outcomes are in alignment with what the particular programs stated they would offer (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Think College recognized that the quality standards and benchmarks should serve as a guide for PSE settings to consider, but equally local resources should be considered so as not to over- or underdevelop a program that will not be sustainable (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Further research is necessary to conduct follow-up interviews with graduates of PSE programs and current students in PSE to bring life to their experiences (Thoma et al., 2012).

Recognizing the impact that human beings have on one another is priceless. In a study by Westling et al. (2013), a survey was administered to assess the attitudes of
students living on a college campus that offered an inclusive PSE for students with ID. A total of 572 students participated in the survey, and the overwhelming response was that they felt the PSE program was beneficial to the participants and the typical college students. Although this survey indicated some responses based on the attitudes of students with ID participating in PSE, it did not explore the depth of the responses or make connections with what the literature identifies as meaningful programs (Neubert et al., 2001; Thoma et al., 2012; Thoma et al., 2011). Further research is needed to explore the lived experiences of students with ID participating in PSE settings to tell the story of how their experience impacted their adult life after PSE (Grigal et al., 2013). The remainder of this section describes the minimal student experiences or stated student experiences based on the four current models for PSE.

Grigal et al. (2012) reported on data collected from a 2009 survey of PSE programs for students with ID in the United States. The survey set out to identify characteristics of successful PSE programs, supports, employment, residential options, campus access, family support, student outcomes, and challenges. As of 2009, some 149 programs existed in 39 states (Grigal et al., 2012). The survey results were positive; however, perceptions of students with ID varied from one PSE program to another. It is important to note the characteristics and trends in both the 2009 survey (Grigal et al., 2012) and the 2013 survey conducted by Westling et al. (2013) in order to use this information for further development of PSE programs as the field grows.

Exiting secondary school and entering postsecondary settings, where adults are expected to function as independent members of society, is an exciting and frightening experience for students with significant disabilities (Grigal & Hart, 2010). With the
appropriate training and support for students with ID during secondary school and continued access to PSE settings, these obstacles can become opportunities and therefore produce contributing members to a diverse society. Creating experiences in postsecondary schools for students with ID creates opportunities for growth in multiple areas, including academic, employment, independent living, self-advocacy, and self-confidence (Hart, 2006). When college is kept in the mix of possibilities for postsecondary experiences for students with ID, all of society benefits, because students see themselves as more similar to than different from their peers, and they build confidence, which promotes success. As noted by several authors from 2006 to 2013, there are four main models for PSE: (a) mixed/hybrid model, (b) substantially separate model, (c) inclusive individual support model, and (d) dual enrollment model (Fekete, 2013; Getzel & Wehman, 2005; Grigal & Hart, 2010; Hart, 2006; Hartz, 2014).

Mixed-Methods Hybrid Model

The mixed/hybrid model includes the opportunity for students with ID to participate in classes with nondisabled peers on an “audit” basis where the students do not earn a specific grade for the course but earn credit for participation. This model also offers employment experience on- or off-campus. The social opportunities are generic—not specified to any particular group or outcome (Fekete, 2013; Hart, 2006; Hartz, 2014). The mixed-methods hybrid model is the most common approach used in PSE, according to the Think College database (Getzel & Wehman, 2005), because it incorporates a blend of integrated courses and separate life-skill programs for individual instruction (Grigal & Hart, 2010; Hartz, 2014).
The student experience in the mixed-methods hybrid model includes a combination of employment, coursework, and campus involvement activities. The number of hours of employment (internship or vocational training) per student ranges from 8 to 10 hours per week and is based on the area of interest. The courses taken over a 2-year period range from general education, academic courses, and life skills to career exploration and electives. In order to be involved in the campus community, the students are required to attend social events, participate in service learning projects, and volunteer to better the community as a whole (Getzel & Wehman, 2005; Grigal & Hart, 2010; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013).

**Substantially Separate Model**

The substantially separate model includes classes on an age-appropriate campus where the students take courses with other disabled peers to learn life skills. Students with ID would have the opportunity to participate in generic social activities, and this type of program usually offers a rotation of preestablished employment options on- or off-campus (Hart, 2006). This model was used in most PSE settings during the 1970s and 1980s when the need for an age-appropriate setting was in demand, and the specific staff supports were hired on an as-needed basis (Neubert et al., 2001). The substantially separate model creates a “presence” on the college campus, but the inclusion of students with ID in the general academic setting does not occur; the focus is on learning life skills and vocational readiness skills (Getzel & Wehman, 2005; Madaus, 2000).

According to Grigal and Hart (2010), the substantially separate model is focused on targeting skills such as personal care, social adjustment, educational assessment and guidance, and adapted computer skills, but the option to practice the skills with the
general population is very limited. One example was Palomar College, which offered 14 classes for students with ID, but no credits were associated with the completion of the courses. Another program out of George Mason University used graduate-level students who were pursuing careers or teaching credentials in special education to teach classes for students with ID in subjects such as citizenship, community outreach, employment exploration, exploratory math, short story writing, nutrition, multimedia, and self-advocacy, but still the courses offered no inclusion with nondisabled peers except for short periods of time in social settings like the cafeteria or the library (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Although the substantially separate model offers physical access in an age-appropriate setting, there is little interaction with nondisabled peers for other means, and the constant challenge for substantially separate models is securing space on the campus to house the program (Getzel & Wehman, 2005; Grigal & Hart, 2010; Grigal et al., 2012).

**Inclusive Individual Model**

The inclusive individual support model offers courses both with and without nondisabled peers, where the goals of education and employment are what drive the services and plans for the individual students. The students with ID may be offered a job coach for a period of time to learn a new job or participate in an internship. The model is created to be collaborative with the students, families, and stakeholders who share responsibility for the well-being of the students in order to meet the students’ educational and career goals (Hart, 2006). Inclusive individual models offer both certificate and degree programs for students with ID; however, the majority are certificate based (Grigal et al., 2012).
Overall, this individual model is more difficult to operationalize due to the unique nature and needs of each individual student with ID who wishes to participate in PSE. Students’ days typically include employment, career exploration, job shadowing, internships, and development of an electronic portfolio. Students with ID attend classes with and without disabled peers, go to tutoring, spend time with a mentor, and engage in social activities on campus with a targeted purpose such as meeting a new friend or asking for help (Getzel & Wehman, 2005; Grigal & Hart, 2010).

Of the three models discussed thus far, the inclusive individual model provides the closest program to support generalization of skills, amongst nondisabled peers, in an age-appropriate setting and with an inclusive mindset where students of all ability types deserve access to higher education; however, this model has also proven to be the most difficult to operationalize due to the variance in student needs and the staffing it takes to support each student (Getzel & Wehman, 2005; Grigal & Hart, 2010; Hart, 2006).

**College Career Connection—A Dual Enrollment Model**

In the effort to develop customized PSE services for students with ID who wish to continue with higher education, the analysis of student interests, needs, career aspirations, adult service supports, technology needs, and vocational training needed is necessary but difficult to coordinate with a multitude of stakeholders. The goal of College Career Connection (C3) was to improve adult outcomes for students with ID by creating access to PSE and employment options that were typically not available (Grigal & Hart, 2010). C3 was a dual enrollment program, which meant that students with ID over the age of 18 who were still serviced under IDEA worked in conjunction with the public school staff and the college community to build a bridge to the college setting as a plan for full-time
transition once the students aged-out of services from IDEA at 21 years old. C3 had a five-step action model to develop the partnership: (a) create the student vision, (b) develop flexible services and supports, (c) assist students with gaining access to college, (d) implement the ongoing services, and (e) evaluate the outcomes and course correct, if needed (Getzel & Wehman, 2005).

The C3 model was successful because it emphasized the relatedness of services in conjunction with collaboration between stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition between secondary education and PSE (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Supports for students who are dually enrolled in high school and college to make a full transition to the college setting manageable will use strategies such as technology support to organize and prioritize daily activities between both settings. Stakeholders from both settings work in collaboration to set up the calendar template for each week and periodically meet with the students to make adjustments to the schedule as needed. A visual schedule allows the students to feel independent in the learning environment while navigating each activity (Nauherimer et al., 2015).

**Think College Database**

Due to the factors of current legislation such as ADAAA (2008) and HEOA (2008), more and more students with ID are entering into 2-year and 4-year IHEs. Recent research cited by Grigal and Hart (2010) and Getzel and Wehman (2005) indicated that only 35% of persons with disabilities reported being employed, which continues to be a small percentage of those employed since the 1990s, and persons with ID exiting high school are the only disability category not earning above minimum wage. Only 15% of students with disabilities exiting high school enroll in higher education, and
less than 8% of students with ID participate in PSE (Grigal & Hart, 2010). When those students with disabilities were surveyed to find out about their quality of life, only 34% said they were very satisfied with their life after high school, but 61% of people without disabilities indicated having a very satisfying life after secondary school (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Considering the current data and the results of legislative, social, and political changes over the last 4 decades, a growing number of colleges are offering programs for individuals with disabilities, including ID, in order to increase the employability rates and quality of life through a PSE experience (Fekete, 2013; Getzel & Wehman, 2005; Grigal & Hart, 2010).

In an effort to create a network of professional linkages, Think College maintains the largest database for the PSE options for students with ID and DD (Think College, n.d.; Thoma et al., 2011). The database is constantly updated as new programs emerge and current models change focus, but as of 2016, 250 PSE programs exist as compared to 138 in 2012. The trend has increased, but the need is still significant (Think College, n.d.; Thoma et al., 2012). Figure 2 represents the number of PSE programs by state as of March 2016.

Geographically, in many states in the Midwest and on the West Coast, it is difficult for students with ID to have access to attend a PSE close to their hometown, and considering there are more than 700,000 persons with ID in the United States, the need to explore the lived experiences of those who have participated in PSE programs is immediate in order to affect the future of PSE program development (Farnham, 2011; Fekete, 2013; Furgang, 2013; Grigal & Hart, 2010; Grigal et al., 2012; Grigal et al., 2013; Hafner, Moffatt, & Kisa, 2011; Hartz, 2014). Table 1 describes 26 TPSID programs...
identified in 2015 for their top three program priorities, program type, and percentage of time spent with nondisabled peers.

In 2015, 26 IHEs were selected for the TPSID grant. As shown in Table 1, the majority of programs include priorities to support students with becoming employed, being self-determined, and having access to college courses. An overwhelming number of the programs include more than 50% of campus time with nondisabled peers, and only one program indicated that the students with ID are not mainstreamed for instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).
Table 1

2015 TPSID Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Top 3 priorities</th>
<th>2-year, 4-year, dual enrollment</th>
<th>% time with nondisabled peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appalachian State University (NC)</td>
<td>Self-determination, college course access, employment</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen Community College (NJ)</td>
<td>College course access, self-determination, social skills development</td>
<td>2-year</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California State University, Fresno (CA)</td>
<td>Self-determination, independent living, employment</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado State University (CO)</td>
<td>College course access, self-determination, life skills instruction</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia State University (GA)</td>
<td>Employment, self-determination, social skills development</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highline College (WA)</td>
<td>Self-determination, college course access, employment</td>
<td>2-year</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacksonville State University (AL)</td>
<td>College course access, social skills, independent living</td>
<td>2-year</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lipscomb University (TN)</td>
<td>Life skills instruction, employment, college course access</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millersville University of Pennsylvania (PA)</td>
<td>Employment, college course access, independent living</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minot State University (ND)</td>
<td>Employment, college course access, self-determination</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio State University (OH)</td>
<td>Self-determination, employment, college course access</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland State University (OR)</td>
<td>Employment, other, self-determination</td>
<td>2-year</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Alabama (AL)</td>
<td>Employment, social skills development, independent living</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Top 3 priorities</td>
<td>2-year, 4-year, dual enrollment</td>
<td>% time with nondisabled peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Central Florida (FL)</td>
<td>Employment, college course access, other</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Hawaii (HI)</td>
<td>College course access, self-determination, employment</td>
<td>2-year</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Kansas (KS)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Massachusetts–Boston (MA)</td>
<td>College course access, self-determination, social skills development</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Memphis (TN)</td>
<td>Employment, social skills development, college course access</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Missouri, Kansas City (MO)</td>
<td>College course access, self-determination, employment</td>
<td>2-year</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Rochester (NY)</td>
<td>Self-determination, life skills instruction, employment</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Alabama (AL)</td>
<td>Employment, social skills development, independent living</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island College (RI)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syracuse University (NY)</td>
<td>College course access, employment, self-determination</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah State University (UT)</td>
<td>College course access, independent living, employment</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanderbilt University (TN)</td>
<td>Employment, self-determination, college course access</td>
<td>4-year</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington State Community College (WA)</td>
<td>Employment, life skills instruction, social skills development</td>
<td>2-year</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Benefits for Students With ID in PSE

Landmark et al. (2010) identified and substantiated eight best practices for transition up to 15 years after successful transition from PSE settings, all of which are supported through the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education: community/agency collaboration, daily living training, employment preparation program participation, general education/inclusion, paid or unpaid work experience, parent/family involvement, self-determination training, and social skills training. Students with ID who have participated in PSE have demonstrated the ability to apply new knowledge in varied environments and engage in social settings with behavior appropriate to the situation and have increased self-determination skills (Blumberg, Carroll, & Petroff, 2008; Mock & Love, 2012).

PSE experiences add value to the lives of students with ID in the areas of employment, social inclusion, self-advocacy, and independence. Students with disabilities who participate in PSE are more likely to be competitively employed after the experience (Zafft et al., 2004). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), in 2013, the median annual earning for people 25-34 years old who had an associate’s degree was $37,030 versus less than $29,950 for high school graduates. Those students with ID who have become competitively employed also have experienced a more inclusive social setting where it was reported that they learned more from their academic courses due to the generalization of skills to the mainstream environment (Thoma et al., 2011). However, a gap in the research still exists to uncover the deeper meaning of the students’ experiences that contributed to the success of their adult lives.
Self-advocacy has been considered a crucial element in the transition process for students with ID from secondary school to PSE settings (IDEIA, 2004). Although self-determination and self-advocacy have been linked to more satisfying adult lives and increased independence, there is little research that has been done to elicit the voices of students with ID who were taught self-determination for independent gain and its effect on employability outcomes after having participated in a PSE setting.

There are other valuable outcomes for students with ID in PSE that include the facilitation of natural supports that demonstrate the capacity of “largely untapped generic organizations to offer inclusion and share in the societal responsibility to accommodate and welcome students with ID” (Uditsky & Hughson, 2012, p. 301). The results of multiple reviews of literature led to the conclusion that faculty attitude was a key factor in determining the success of the students with ID in PSE, and as the faculty became more informed about the students with ID, their impressions of the students’ abilities improved (Fekete, 2013).

**Barriers for Students With ID in PSE**

Challenges for students with ID in PSE settings exist no matter the interventions that are in place; however, the likelihood of potential success versus failure due to never trying is higher for students who choose to explore higher education despite all odds (Getzel & Wehman, 2005; Grigal & Hart, 2010; Grigal et al., 2001). Space limitations, staff inconsistencies and need for ongoing training, scheduling issues, curriculum debates, and transportation are all factors that create barriers for students with ID to access PSE settings (Hart, 2006). Additionally, students with ID in PSE experience difficulty with study skills, test taking, organization, and synthesis of information in
academically demanding subjects (Bolt, Decker, Lloyd, & Morlock, 2011). Universally, research has shown that barriers exist from the viewpoint of the nondisabled individuals (inclusive of the faculty) at IHEs who have felt that including students with ID in academic courses would “water down” the content and cause discouragement of other students and that students with ID were at risk of being taken advantage of or were too needy and would take away from the development of the other students (Hafner et al., 2011).

Beyond the personal aspect of integration of students with ID in PSE exists a barrier of funding for tuition because most PSE funding traditionally came through private payment, dual enrollment through IDEA, or vocational rehabilitation scholarships (Grigal et al., 2012). Since the implementation of HEOA (2008) and the partnership with PSE and TPSID, funding has not been as significant of a barrier; however, for students who do not have access to a PSE supported by TPSID, there is little to no opportunity for financial aid support to cover tuition costs (Grigal et al., 2012). Other challenges include a lack of availability of residential opportunities for independent experiences, low expectations of staff, and a lack of preparation or necessary accommodations for students with ID to be successful in PSE settings (Grigal & Hart, 2010).

The most threatening of all barriers is the unknown student voice, which could be exposed through qualitative research to uncover the thoughts and experiences of the students with ID who have participated in a higher education environment. According to the lived experiences of the students who participated in PSE programs, what did they perceive as meaningful and helpful for their development as employable and satisfied adults?
Similar Studies

This section makes a deeper connection with the need to further research student experiences in PSE. In the past 5 years, six seminal studies were conducted that were related to students with ID accessing PSE settings, and the results proved meaningful for this current study as the researcher reviewed the literature. An additional four studies indicated research on either students with ID or PSE, but a gap in the research exists to bring meaning to the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE settings and how the experience impacts them in adult life. The results of the related research are compared to degrees of certainty to substantiate the need for the current research.

Comparison of Studies

The current studies have shown that research in higher education covers a broad spectrum of issues such as structures, practices, and perceived outcomes. While the research is in demand, it continues to prove that only a small percentage of students with ID go on to higher education due to the barriers that exist. This is due to the varied programs and limited options in certain demographic areas. Although the PSE for students with ID has evolved over the last 4 decades and legislation has raised the bar for services for students with ID, there is limited funding for continued research and development and limited research that would offer acknowledgment of the meaningful experiences that students with ID had while in a PSE setting. Continued development and research should be guided by standards of practice that are validated by experts, but due to limited resources, the current literature does not reflect the current practice in terms of understanding the meaningful experiences of the students with ID in PSE.
Contrasts of Studies

The descriptions of PSE settings have produced limited data that would include the description of outcomes based on the experiences had in PSE by students with ID. The results of several studies, as discussed in Chapter II, led to the conclusion that several gaps exist, including longitudinal research to capture the changes in attitudes and perceptions of faculty over time concerning the inclusion of students with ID in PSE settings, continued research on the outcomes of graduates from PSE programs and the impact of their original participation in PSE, the relationship between PSE settings for students with ID and their impact on employment outcomes, quality of training provided in PSE and its effect on overall satisfaction and happiness for students with ID as adults, cross studies to seek comparisons in outcomes between PSE programs, and overall engagement in PSE settings with nondisabled peers (Farnham, 2011; Fekete, 2013; Furgang, 2013; Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011; Hartz, 2014; Platt, 2013; Prohn, 2014; Thoma et al., 2011).

Gaps in the Research

This section begins to specify the population and sample in which the gaps in literature exist. For example, this current study focused on the need to give life to the voices of the students with ID who participate in PSE settings in Southern California that have been identified as implementing the eight Think College standards for inclusive higher education so that their experiences are meaningful and recognized for their contribution to their community.
The current study focused on the gap that exists where the students’ voices and experiences have fallen secondary to initial research and development of the PSE programs for students with ID. Transition from secondary school to PSE settings for students with ID is complex and requires flexible and collaborative partners willing to lead the field with innovative ideas to better serve students with ID who choose to actively seek a more productive life through higher education. A moral imperative rests with the research community to examine the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE to highlight the meaning of their capabilities as 21st-century learners and contributors to society.

Creating and sustaining PSE settings is vital for future generations to continue as lifelong learners. Research has suggested that this process must begin with a collaborative effort between secondary education and PSE settings (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Through collaboration between the two entities, programs can be drafted according to the specific needs of those involved to create a framework of expectations, desired outcomes for participants, and potential community impact. While students are still in secondary school, teams can work diligently to prepare these students for success in PSE settings. Identifying the attitudes and perceptions of those who have completed PSE programs can provide stakeholders with information to further develop PSE programs that meet the needs of all participants and anticipate the needs of upcoming learners.

Summary

According to the literature, students with ID have been offered very few opportunities for PSE when compared to the college options for their nondisabled peers (Furgang, 2013; Grigal & Hart, 2010; Thoma et al., 2011). Over the last 4 decades,
postsecondary options have changed their focus from offering social opportunities to providing skills that would lead to successful employment. In the 1970s, postsecondary options primarily offered social opportunities for students to participate in. In the 1980s, the support for postsecondary programs seemed to decline; however, it is important to consider that programs existed yet were not documented accordingly. In the 1990s, documented postsecondary options grew but lacked data regarding the outcomes of those who participated and perceptions of those who provided the education to the students (Neubert et al., 2001).

Despite the improvements at the turn of the century, many PSE programs still only offer exposure to social and recreational activities for students with ID, but most fail to offer a prescribed program specially designed to meet the needs of individuals with ID who seek to continue learning on an age-appropriate campus. Inclusive classrooms exist for students who require only minimal accommodations to access the content, whereas students with ID would be offered more of a mainstream option in courses that would promote social, physical (mobility), or recreational experiences. The opportunities seem to exist; however, they are very limited in scope and sequence for students with ID (Kardos, 2011).

A review of the literature highlighted the significant gains for students with ID accessing higher education. The HEOA of 2008 outlined program components that a PSE setting should contain for students with ID to participate. The components included access to an academic environment, socialization, independent living skills, integrated work experiences, person-centered planning, and coordination with IHEs to create sustainability and offer a meaningful credential for the students who participate upon the
completion of the program (HEOA, 2008). Colleges that were able to define programs according to these criteria were recognized as CTPs. PSE settings that developed a plan for inclusion of students with ID were offered participation in a 5-year grant called TPSID. With the increasing number of students accessing PSE (California Department of Education, 2016), colleges and universities can benefit from understanding what it means to meet the needs of individual learners, especially those who have ID.

**Synthesis Matrix**

The researcher used a synthesis matrix (Appendix A) to gather resources and identify those that related to the variables in the study. A chart was created to validate the relatedness of sources and demonstrate reliability of the summary of literature.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Through qualitative design, researchers begin with an inquisitive passion for uncovering previously hidden truths (Fetterman, 2010). Selecting the best method to conduct the research can be the single most important factor a researcher considers before beginning the research journey (Patton, 2015). This study aimed to investigate the lived experiences of students with intellectual disabilities (ID) in postsecondary education (PSE) settings in Southern California in order to gain insight into the students’ perceptions of meaningful experiences that impacted them in terms of college preparedness, employment success, and independence in the adult world. The study used the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education as a guide to investigate the students’ experiences in college settings that embraced the Think College standards for comprehensive transition programs (CTPs).

This study aimed at capturing the essence of the experience of students with ID in PSE settings as it related to the outcomes in their adult lives. According to Wolcott (2008), a qualitative approach would best describe how people in the group studied make sense of their environment and how their experiences impact their behavior. In order to examine those experiences of students with ID in PSE settings, a qualitative approach was most appropriate to represent the complex interaction of life and the perception of the lived experiences (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For means of this study, it was imperative that the students’ voices were heard (Creswell, 2012) so that reflection on their experiences would impact the future of higher education for students with ID.
Overview

Whereas Chapter II reviewed the literature surrounding higher education for students with ID, Chapter III describes the qualitative use of ethnography to explore the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE settings in Southern California. The remainder of Chapter III describes the purpose behind the research and the research question, the methodological design using a qualitative approach through ethnography, the population and sample considered for the study, the instruments used to establish validity and reliability for the data collected, how the data were collected and analyzed, limitations to the research, and finally, a summary of the chapter’s critical points.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to examine and describe the lived experiences of seven students with intellectual disabilities (ID) participating in two postsecondary education (PSE) settings in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education.

Research Question

This study was guided by one central question designed to explore the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education, to investigate and examine the lived experiences of students with ID participating in PSE settings in Southern California. The research question for this study was as follows: What were the lived experiences of students with ID participating in PSE programs in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education?
Research Design

The purpose of the research design was to determine the best plan of action that would result in drawing valid conclusions from the data collected by the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The procedures for collecting the data were considered as to how the research would be conducted, who the participants would be, and what the participants would be expected to do. In order to answer the research question, to investigate the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE settings in Southern California, the researcher chose a qualitative research design aimed at producing results in the form of stories from the participants that could not be quantified using a quantitative design (Creswell, 2012).

Qualitative Research

The most important factor for the researcher when considering the research design was that qualitative inquiry gave the participants a chance to express and reflect on their experiences, make meaningful connections with their learning, and uncover ideas and behaviors that would not be recognized if not for the careful eye of the qualitative researcher (Creswell, 2014). For this research, qualitative inquiry offered the best approach to describe how students with ID make sense of their experiences in PSE, and it strengthened their voices through empathizing with their perspective and honoring their contribution to the adult community (Creswell, 2012; Grigal et al., 2013).

Qualitative research aims to retell a story so that the reader gets a sense of the time and place where the experience began (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) described that in qualitative research, 12 core strategies within three areas exist that the researcher should consider to conduct solid qualitative inquiry. The first area of design strategies
related to how the researcher considered the setting and the participants. The second area of strategies was data collection, and the third area was analysis and reporting strategies. Data collection and data analysis are discussed under separate headings later in this chapter (Patton, 2015).

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described that a researcher who chooses to use a qualitative approach is interested in exploring the meaning of the experiences of the subjects being studied. One may wish to explore the thoughts, feelings, or culture of a group of individuals who have been exposed to similar situations or would have access to similar knowledge or awareness of a given situation. Patten (2012) explained that qualitative research intends to examine themes that emerge from the subjects’ words through interviews and observations. The researcher is considered the instrument of the study, and he or she “plays” his or her instrument within the field of subjects he or she is studying, paying close attention to details that emerge during the observations, which guide the design and collection of the data as they surface. As themes in the data occur, the researcher is challenged to identify the themes and then allow those themes to speak their own language. When summarizing qualitative research, the results will most often be represented in narrative form, oftentimes using the first person or direct quotes from the subjects studied (ChrisFlipp, 2014).

For design strategies, the researcher should consider naturalistic inquiry, a study of real-world situations as they occur in the moment; emergent design flexibility, where the researcher is able to adapt to the situation and pursue new paths of questioning or observation as they emerge; and purposeful sampling, where the researcher selects the participants from a rich group of individuals with experience in the area of inquiry
(Patton, 2015). For this study, the researcher was cognizant of using the natural observation setting to gain insight on the behavior observed without words, used flexibility when interviewing the participants to draw out deeper meaning, and selected participants with ID in PSE settings as the “experts” in the field.

The researcher selected a qualitative design to assist in gaining deeper knowledge of how the experiences for the students with ID in PSE impacted them in their adult lives; quantitative research methods were not appropriate for this study, as the lived experiences of the human subjects could not be quantified through the analysis of numbers but needed to be examined for insight into the group culture that would impact the future of higher education (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Based on the review of literature in Chapter II, there has been little research conducted to gain meaning from the perspective of the students with ID in PSE and the impact that the experience had on their adult lives—in employment and overall independence (Grigal et al., 2012; Hart, 2006). This study made a significant effort to fill the gap in the literature by hearing the voices of students with ID in higher education.

**Ethnography**

Ethnographic research begins with a question. The question may take various forms and guides the researcher in understanding the potential data to be collected. The researcher would choose to dig deep into the lived experiences of a people’s culture or thoughts on a given topic, or the researcher would look for the relationship between a people’s behaviors when introduced to a given variable. When a researcher embarks on a research journey, understanding which method of inquiry would best support the anticipated outcome of the study will benefit the researcher in order to make logical
connections to or support solid relationships between what is being studied (Patton, 2015).

According to Patton (2015), ethnography explains the culture of a group and its perceptions and behaviors based on those beliefs. According to Wolcott (2008), ethnographers look for linkages amongst members within the group because they will share characteristics that lead the researcher to identify the larger social context in which the members share. Using the approach as an ethnographic researcher, it was the eyes and ears of the researcher that captured and collected the data in the natural setting where the students were participating (Wolcott, 2008). To gather adequate data, the collection occurred during the fall semester of 2016, from September to December. The time spent with the administration, teachers, students, and families created an intimate acquaintance and, hopefully, lasting relationships (Patton, 2015; Wolcott, 2008).

**Advantages.** Using the method of ethnography to explore the thoughts of the instructors and professors of students with ID in PSE provided insight to the researcher as to how they perceived the students’ ability versus their disability and whether the professors’ perceptions about that group of students impacted the students’ ability to be successful in the classes.

**Disadvantages.** Using an ethnographic methodology was difficult because the method called for intensive observation of the environment; because the researcher is an educator, which may have presented bias; and because the research took place during a typical school day, which required that the researcher take significant time off of work to complete the research. The researcher also observed the professors during normal classroom instruction. The interviews were completed after instructional time, which
required additional time commitments from all participants. For the research to be of high quality, representation of the dynamic teaching environment and the rich stories told by the participants required significant time from the researcher and the participants at the colleges/universities in Southern California.

After careful consideration by the researcher, ethnography was chosen as the best methodology to answer the research question because the researcher was interested in understanding the collective experience of multiple people including students with ID; the administrators, professors, and staff members who support PSE programs; the family members of students with ID in PSE; and nondisabled peers who interact with the students with ID on the PSE campus (Wolcott, 2008). The researcher gathered a rich collection of perspectives, experiences, and stories to understand and describe the culture of this group of students with ID who participate in PSE environments (Patton, 2015; Wolcott, 2008).

**Population**

According to Creswell (2012), a population is defined by the similarity of characteristics within the group of individuals. The overall population considered for this study was 250 PSE programs for students with ID that existed nationwide at the time of the study and were inclusive of the Think College framework for inclusive higher education. According to the Think College 2014 annual report (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), 883 students with ID participated in PSE settings across the United States through the Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID). According to the Think College (n.d.) database, 250 programs existed in the United States as of March 2016, but only 26 participated in the TPSID
program. The remaining 224 programs presented themselves as having opportunities for students with ID to participate in a college experience and were representative of the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education. PSE experiences vary from campus clubs, elective courses, and volunteer work on the campus to accessing academic coursework toward a certificate or degree (Think College, n.d.). Although the researcher chose to study PSE programs that identified with the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education, it should be noted that other college settings may offer opportunities for students with varying disabilities, including ID, but may not be inclusive of the criteria described by Think College. Although all 250 PSE programs were identified as implementing and abiding by the Think College framework for inclusive higher education, only 26 completed the application to be part of the TPSID grant as of 2015.

**Target Population**

In order to narrow the population into a sampling frame that was representative of the group, the researcher identified a target population based on the same characteristics of the total population (Creswell, 2012). For purposes of this study, the researcher chose to narrow the population search to PSE settings in California that were representative of the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education. The researcher chose California as a target population because the researcher lived in California, and she used convenience sampling to reasonably access the participants for the study. As of 2016, 16 colleges/universities had identified programs to support students with ID: one was a 4-year university in Fresno (California State
University, Fresno), 13 were 2-year programs, and two were technical colleges (Think College, n.d.).

**Sample Population**

In order to narrow the target population and make gathering data reasonable, the researcher identified the PSE programs in Southern California as the sample most accessible to the researcher that represented a piece of the total population as defined by the characteristics of the larger group (Creswell, 2012). Of the seven PSE programs that existed in Southern California at the time of the study, six were 2-year programs, and one was a technical/transition program (dual enrollment) in partnership with the San Diego Unified School District. The researcher considered a reasonable number of the total PSE programs in Southern California and chose two of the seven PSE settings as the sample population because they were within reasonable proximity and accessible to the researcher. Figure 3 presents the population data in visual format.

*Figure 3. Population breakdown of PSE settings for students with ID in California as of 2016. Data from “Homepage,” by Think College, n.d., retrieved March 1, 2016, from www.thinkcollege.net.*
Sample

Convenience sampling was considered by the researcher because it reflected the available group of subjects who were accessible to the researcher and were within a reasonable distance to conduct multiple in-person interviews and observations (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The primary purpose of the research was to better understand the relationship of the lived experiences and the outcomes from them; therefore, convenience sampling was appropriate to use because the participants were representative of the population studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The PSE settings identified for the study were Pathway at UCLA and the Transition to Independent Living (TIL) program at Taft College in Taft, California. Pathway and TIL were selected because they were well-established programs and were within a reasonable distance (convenience sampling) for the researcher to travel to as often as needed to collect data, complete observations, and conduct interviews with students with ID and stakeholders who supported the PSE programs. Figure 4 represents the sample for the study. Pathway at UCLA represented a major university setting, and TIL at Taft represented a community college setting.

At each of the PSE settings, the researcher conducted interviews with students, family members of the students, program directors, program managers, program staff members, college faculty/professors, and nondisabled peers. In total, the researcher conducted seven individual student interviews; seven student classroom observations; eight nonacademic student observations; seven individual interviews with the students’ family members; six individual interviews with the program directors, managers, and staff members; two individual interviews with college faculty/professors; and two
individual interviews with college students who identified themselves as nondisabled peers.

Figure 4. Sample for the study. Data from “Homepage,” by Think College, n.d., retrieved March 1, 2016, from www.thinkcollege.net.

Pathway at UCLA

Pathway at UCLA is a 2-year program on a 4-year university campus in Southern California, designed for students with ID and developmental disabilities (DD) to access higher education in an effort to lead independent lives with greater career opportunities (UCLA Extension, n.d.). Pathway offers not only enriched academic opportunities but also the chance to broaden social skills that create lifelong relationships while pursuing a fulfilling career. Pathway has been in existence since 2001 and continues to evolve in its innovative practices to support students with ID in PSE. Pathway creates inclusive opportunities for students with ID to learn in more than one way and challenges each individual student to find the greatness within his or her ability. Through partnerships
with local agencies, businesses for vocational experiences, and nondisabled students as mentors, pathway students are offered a fully inclusive college experience with the necessary supports to propel them into adulthood with successful careers (UCLA Extension, n.d.).

**TIL at Taft College**

TIL at Taft College is a PSE experience for adults with DD and ID. The program provides instruction in life-skill academics and vocational training for students to become functional members in society (Taft College, n.d.). Students work toward a life-skills certificate after completion of 2 years of coursework. TIL believes that adult students with ID and other DD deserve an academic environment with enriching collegiate experiences, inclusive environments, learning transferable to lifelong productivity, career education promoting competitive employment, and development of self-determination skills by empowering the individuals through continued educational experiences. The students gain these skills through experiences living both on- and off-campus with peers and through mentorships developed with nondisabled peers through natural interactions in academic and social environments where students engage with one another (Taft College, n.d.).

**Instrumentation**

Strong qualitative inquiry involves successful completion of gathering, focusing, and analyzing the data (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). The instruments used to gather the data are the most important in the process because otherwise the researcher will have nothing to focus or analyze. This section discusses the tools the researcher used to gather the data in this study and the validity, reliability, and intercoder
reliability of the instruments so that the researcher was well prepared to collect accurate data (Lofland et al., 2006). The instruments the researcher used were semistructured interview questions (Appendices B-E); observations (Appendix F) in academic, nonacademic, and employment settings; and a review of artifacts, and the researcher acted as the ethnographer to gather the data.

The researcher conducted semistructured interviews with students with ID (Appendix B), faculty/administrators/staff (Appendix C), family members of students with ID in PSE (Appendix D), and an individual or focus group of nondisabled peers and other faculty/staff (Appendix E). The development of the interview questions was based on a subset of the 2006 National Longitudinal Transition Study–2 (NLTS2) survey and the Think College framework for higher education. The researcher also gathered artifacts such as student transcripts, brochures from the programs, course syllabi, and student work samples.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), triangulation of data refers to a convergence of findings where a cross-validation of all data types shows a representation of the common themes that emerged from the data. In order to triangulate the data, in addition to the interviews and artifacts, the researcher conducted in-depth observations of the students in the classroom environment (academic), within social settings (nonacademic), and on vocational/employment trainings (if applicable). The ethnographer assumes the role of the explorer to discover the culture that exists from the group being observed (Fetterman, 2010). The researcher used observation logs (Appendix F) to collect data regarding the behavior and nuances of the environment in an effort to answer the research question for this study. The researcher was qualified to
collect the observational data due to having 20 years of experience working with students with ID in various educational settings.

The interview and observation schedules were created based on the individual participant availability, the time that the students were participating in courses, social settings and employment experiences, the families’ schedules, and location availability where the focus group interviews took place.

**Researcher as Instrument**

The researcher as an ethnographer becomes the eyes, ears, and sole collector of the data in order to make meaning of the data and represent them in a way that persuades the reader to see what is written beyond the text (Fetterman, 2010).

**Expert Panel as Instrument**

The researcher sought out experts in the field of PSE to provide feedback on interview questions for potential participants. Specifically, the researcher was able to collaborate with Dr. Grigal, seminal author of studies of students with ID in PSE and trailblazer in inclusive higher education, to seek feedback regarding the nature of the study and intention of the research.

**Pilot Test as Instrument**

After significant reflection from others regarding the goals of the research, the researcher/ethnographer piloted the interview questions with current educators who support secondary schools and students with ID in transition programs to seek further reflection and redefinition of the interview questions in order to answer the research question.
Cultural Informant as Instrument

The researcher was supported by a cultural informant, when needed, to navigate the uniqueness of the cultural group observed in order to understand the meaning of the behavior amongst group members. The cultural informant was selected from within the cultural group observed and had a significant understanding of the cultural group. The cultural informant was considered qualified as someone who was familiar with the PSE program that supports students with ID, was knowledgeable of the Think College framework, and had at least one semester of interaction with the student population. The cultural informant supported the researcher in mitigating any misunderstandings between the researcher and the participants in order to gain deeper meaning from the interviews and observations conducted. For example, if the researcher asked a participant a question that he or she seemed unable to answer, the cultural informant explained the context of the question to the participant in a way that enabled the participant to better understand what the question was getting at.

Additionally, the researcher used both an etic and emic approach to gathering and making sense of the cultural norms of the group. The emic accounts were descriptive stories and perspectives of those within the group studied, and the etic account was developed through a scientific approach used by the researcher to create understanding of the behavior observed by those in the cultural group.

Validity

Instrument validity refers to the degree to which the questions in the interview and the content requested by the observation align with the research questions (Patton, 2015). The interview questions for the various stakeholders were based on a subset of the
2006 NLTS2 survey questions and the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education program. The interview questions (Appendices B-E) were created based on previous studies used by other researchers, as described in Chapter II, who used qualitative inquiry methods. The observation log (Appendix F) was derived from the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education.

**Content Validity**

The interview questions and the observation log underwent examination by experts in the field of inclusive higher education. The experts gave the researcher feedback on the number of questions to be completed within a 1-hour interview, the variety of questions to include all areas of the framework, and possible “digging-deeper” or follow-up questions for the researcher to ask in order to gain the most authentic responses from the participants. The researcher also participated in pilot interviews where sample participants acted as interviewees and the researcher practiced the craft of interviewing so that the time spent seemed more like deep conversation between individuals versus scripted, back-and-forth question-and-answer sessions.

**Reliability**

Instrument reliability refers to the strength of trustworthiness that the responses from the instruments (interviews, observations, and artifacts) produced that reflected similar trends and themes to support answering the research question (Patton, 2015). When the instrument is reliable, the responses from the participants will be authentic and true to the source. The researcher remained cognizant of ethical considerations, used a nonjudgmental approach, showed empathy, expressed true interest in the participants’
responses, and remained objective while using the instruments to collect the data (Patton, 2015).

**Internal reliability.** Internal reliability refers to how the researcher used the data collected from the interviews, observations, and artifacts to triangulate the responses in order to make sense of the picture that collective data created and the cohesive story that was reflected through multiple data entries (Patton, 2015). The researcher also received feedback from the expert panel on the interview questions, specifically for the students, to ensure that the questions were not convoluted with terminology that might confuse the students or lead to responses that did not align with the research question. The expert panel included three special education professionals who had at least 10 years of experience working with students with ID and were knowledgeable of the transition demands of higher education. The researcher concluded that the stronger the instrument for data collection was, the more authentic the responses would be from the participants.

**Intercoder reliability.** Additionally, the researcher considered intercoder reliability, which refers to how the data were coded for themes, trends, and frequency of responses by an additional, “blind” researcher (Patton, 2015). Ten percent of the data collected from the interviews, observations, and artifacts were presented to an outside researcher, who was also a doctoral candidate, who confirmed the themes, trends, and frequency counts of the data collected.

**Data Collection**

Exploring an ethnographic method allowed the researcher to dig into the lived experiences of the seven students (ages 18-28) with ID participating in two PSE programs in Southern California as aligned to the Think College framework for inclusive
higher education to understand how the experience impacted the students in their adult lives. The researcher also collected data from the administration, teachers, staff, and the families of the students with ID who had participated in PSE. Using an ethnographic approach to examine, understand, and describe the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE allowed for emphasis and consideration of the relationships between the eight conceptual standards for inclusive higher education and the outcomes of adult life, including employment and overall independence. Ethnography was flexible and resilient to exposing the truths through the interviews with participants as well as the examination of the artifacts gathered to examine the lived experiences and created culture of the group of students with ID in PSE (Fetterman, 2010).

It was the intention of the researcher to examine, understand, and describe the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE settings in order to understand the effects of outcomes on their adult lives, including employment and overall independence. The researcher identified the target population of PSE settings in Southern California according to eight standards of the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education. The sampling procedure and selection process is described in greater detail in this section to substantiate the rationale for using these sampling methods.

For this study, students with ID who were participating in a PSE program in Southern California, according to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education, needed to be solicited to participate so that the research question could be answered. The sample size was small to begin with; the two colleges in the study only had a total of approximately 75 students, and not all of the
students who participated in the programs had ID. Of the students who were identified as having ID, the researcher also considered the level of independence that the students had.

The researcher identified a topic of interest in studying lived experiences of students with ID in PSE and collaborated with the administrators of the PSE programs and members of the office of students with disabilities to seek out the individuals (students with ID, staff, faculty, and nondisabled peers) who were likely to have relevant data and were a rich source information (Patten, 2012; Patton, 2015). In order for the researcher to ensure that the students who agreed to participate in the study matched the criteria of having an ID, the informed consent form (Appendix G) included a release-of-information statement allowing the researcher access to educational documentation held by the PSE programs that would identify the students as having ID according to the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA, 2008) definition. The description of how the members were solicited for the study and the exact steps the researcher took to organize and prepare for data collection are provided in the section on data collection procedures and data collection preparation.

**Summary of Data Collection**

The researcher sought to tell the story of the experiences of students with ID in PSE beginning with the students’ voices, but the stories were enriched from the perspectives of others surrounding the PSE community who saw the students’ contributions as meaningful. Ethnography was flexible and resilient to exposing the truths through the interviews with participants as well as the examination of the artifacts gathered to examine the lived experiences and created culture of the group of students with ID in PSE (Fetterman, 2010).
After the researcher had identified the participants for the study, the following methods were used to collect all of the data necessary to tell the fullest and most meaningful stories of students with ID participating in PSE settings in Southern California. Over the course of 12 to 14 weeks between the months of September and December 2016, the following steps were taken:

- The researcher spent a total of 12 full days of direct time at UCLA and Taft College.
- The researcher conducted over 28 hours of recorded interviews with participants.
  - Individual interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 1.5 hours.
- The researcher completed 25.5 hours of direct student observations.
  - Each student was observed a minimum of twice (once in an academic setting and once in either a vocational or recreational setting).
  - Individual observations lasted 30 minutes to 1.5 hours.
- The researcher dedicated 30 hours of inclusive observation time on the two campuses attempting to immerse in the culture of the PSE setting.
  - This time included tours and informal observations of classrooms, campus resources and facilities, natural environmental supports, and observations of relationships and interactions of PSE staff and students.

Figure 5 represents the sample size of the participants for the two PSE programs in the study.

**Ethical Considerations and IRB**

As suggested by Creswell (2012), obtaining consent from the human samples who contributed to the research study was imperative so that the participants understood the
scope of the research, the time required, how the data would be collected, and how the integrity and confidentiality of the participants would be strictly maintained by the researcher.

In order to preserve the rights of the protected population identified for the research study, the researcher submitted a request for research to the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) as a standard review due to the protected population of sample student subjects the researcher considered. In order to protect the confidentiality of all of the participants, including those sample students with ID in PSE, the researcher requested that the students sign an informed consent form (Appendix G) to participate in the study. For the students with ID in PSE who were considered for the study, the researcher requested that only students who maintained their own educational and adult rights be considered to participate. For this study, students with ID participating in PSE were considered nonconserved adults and maintained the same rights
to adult decision making as those considered nondisabled. According to the law on age of majority, as cited in the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), a person who has reached the threshold of majority, according to the nature of the activity, is recognized as an adult by law and capable of managing his or her own affairs.

However, additional consideration was taken by the researcher to protect the human rights of the adult students with ID, and students were offered the opportunity to bring a supportive representative with them during the interview if they chose to do so. The supportive representative was selected by the students as an individual who the students felt had their best educational interests in mind. Although any supportive representative was requested to sign an informed consent form for the study in order to protect the confidentiality of the responses shared by the students, the supportive representatives were not included as part of the study and did not contribute to the responses by the students. Any discussion the supportive representatives contributed to the student participants’ responses was not used for purposes of the study by the researcher.

Although the researcher defined eligible sample students with ID as those who maintained their own rights as typical adults, the researcher took additional precautionary measures to protect the confidentiality and dignity of the adult students with ID in PSE by requesting that the family members who would also be participating in the study sign a parent assent/informed consent form (Appendix G) that included acknowledgement of the adult students’ rights but with additional assent to allow the students with ID in PSE to contribute to the research study. The parent assent/informed consent served two
functions: acknowledgement and agreement to contribute to the study as a family member of a student with ID in PSE, and consideration of the rights of the adult student with ID in PSE to participate in the study as long as the student him/herself signed in agreement to be part of the research. Additionally, the researcher discussed with the participants that at any time during the interviews or observations, the participants maintained the rights to discontinue participation, take breaks during the interviews as needed, or decline to respond to any question that they chose not to answer.

Finally, after the approval from the BUIRB was returned to the researcher on September 7, 2016 (Appendix H), a formal permission letter from Pathway at UCLA (Appendix I) and IRB approval from Taft College (Appendix J) to study its TIL program were requested, and permission was granted by the administration of the individual PSE sites to conduct the research during the fall semester of 2016. It should be noted that the researcher was required by Taft College to request permission from the Taft College IRB before data collection would begin, which explains why the researcher had two approvals from IRB. Taft College IRB requested that the researcher remove the parent assent/informed consent due to the study recognizing eligible students with ID as being nonconserved adults and in charge of their own educational rights according to the age of majority as identified in IDEIA (2004). As a result, the researcher drafted a separate informed consent form for the interviews of participants at Taft College (Appendix G).

Types of Data

The type of data that were collected consisted of in-person and phone interviews where the participants shared stories of student success in the classroom and how that affected or transferred to their success outside of the classroom, in adulthood, in
employment, and in overall independence. The researcher also collected artifacts such as attendance reports, class syllabi, and course descriptions to triangulate the themes that emerged from the data. These artifacts provided data regarding how students with ID were attending, progressing, and succeeding in the PSE setting according to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education.

Within the data collection strategies, the 12 core strategies of qualitative inquiry required the researcher to be mindful of how the qualitative data were collected so that the observations yielded thick, rich description to paint a picture for the reader (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, the researcher used personal experience and engagement, a means of inquiring and responding with the participants to draw out rich meaning; empathic neutrality and mindfulness, where the researcher established a nonjudgmental approach to build rapport; and a dynamic systems perspective, where attention to the process and careful inquiry is used so the researcher is highly attentive to the system (Patton, 2015). The data collected through the interviews, observations, and artifacts created a story to give the reader the sense of being transported in time and space to where the observation occurred (Patton, 2015).

**Interviews.** The interview (Appendices B-E) was the richest data-gathering method and required intensive verbal exchanges where the researcher hung on every last word from the participants, looking for cultural connotations to convey deeper meaning for the group studied (Fetterman, 2010). Interviews were conducted with a total of seven students with ID, seven parents or family members of the students with ID, four faculty/administrative members from each of the two PSE sites, and one nondisabled peer from each PSE site.
The researcher used formal and semistructured interviews (Appendices B-E) where the participants were aware of the explicit research goals (Appendix K) in an effort to make connections amongst the group. The researcher was careful to consider how the structured interview questions may have shaped responses from the participants, but the researcher remained cognizant of the participants being seen as having the “inside” perspective or being the “expert” on the topic in order to elicit a genuine response (Fetterman, 2010). The researcher was assisted by a cultural informant, when necessary, who served as a mediator of the unknown cultural setting in which the researcher was engaged. The cultural informant supported the researcher in navigating the uniqueness of the culture where the participants were engaged as a means to better understand the cultural group (Fetterman, 2010).

**Observations.** The power of direct observation (Appendix F) was helpful to the researcher to fill in the gaps between the spoken word and the action and expression of human interaction (Patton, 2015). Through the observations, the researcher was able to collect natural data where the participants were free to interact as if no one was watching (Fetterman, 2010). The researcher observed each of the seven students in two settings: academic and nonacademic or employment. A total of 15 observations were collected.

Although the researcher was not able to be fully immersed in the culture of the group by living in the area or within close proximity to the participants for direct observation in a variety of settings as a natural part of the researcher’s day (Fetterman, 2010), the researcher was able to capture realistic and ritualistic behaviors of the participants in the classroom, on the college campus, in vocational settings, and in social settings to absorb the experiences of the individuals studied.
**Artifact reviews.** Artifacts collected for this study were used for triangulation of data and to draw deeper meaning from the data gathered (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The artifacts included copies of students’ transcripts indicating progress in the PSE setting, brochures from the colleges promoting the programs, student work samples from coursework or on-the-job evaluations, syllabi from the courses offered, and contracts/agreements from mentors of students with ID. Artifacts were gathered from each PSE setting for the students in the study through the release of information that was signed on the informed consent document (Appendix G) prior to beginning the study. These documents supported the researcher in examining the relationships between the interviews and observations, and connectedness to the group culture as described by the artifacts (Fetterman, 2010). Artifacts gathered that contained student information were protected first through permission from the authors to examine them and then by having the names of students redacted from the documents.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher spent approximately 12 to 14 weeks collecting data from the introduction e-mails sent to the PSE settings for the initial meeting with the administrators to convey the need for the research, follow-up e-mail and phone communication to set up the individual interviews and observations, planning for the individual and/or focus group interviews, and review of artifacts collected during the research period. The next sections describe how the researcher strategically planned for the implementation of each of the data collection methods in order to satisfy the research question.
**Data collection preparation.** In order to reach out to the potential candidates for the study, the researcher identified the administrators in charge at each of the colleges using the Think College database to search for PSE programs (Appendix L). The researcher used e-mail communication to send a drafted letter to the director of each college to seek his or her expertise and participation in the study (Appendix M). The letter indicated to the stakeholders the need for the study and requested that they consider identifying participants who were willing to participate. Once a dialogue began with the administration, the researcher set up an initial meeting (in person or by phone) to discuss the research, present a need for the study, and discuss timelines, concerns, or questions that the administration might have had. The researcher also used the resources of the PSE programs’ offices of students with disabilities to help identify potential candidates to participate in the research. The staff within the office of students with disabilities at each PSE program directed the researcher to knowledgeable stakeholders on the PSE campus who would be an asset to the research study and had the ability to identify other potential participants.

Once the PSE program administrators agreed to participate, an orientation meeting was scheduled to invite the students with ID to participate in the study. Each PSE site included a team of administrators, professors, and nondisabled peers who agreed to be part of the research study. A flyer (Appendix N) was developed and sent home with the individual students so that their families were aware of the potential for participation in the research to gain insight about the students’ experiences in PSE settings. Additionally, faculty and nondisabled peers/mentors who worked with the students with ID were invited to attend the informational meeting to be part of a focus group.

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The orientation meetings were held on the individual campuses where the students were familiar with attending classes. The flyer included the researcher’s contact information so that if potential participants wanted information prior to the event, they could contact the researcher. The flyer also mentioned that food would be provided at no cost to potential participants who would attend the orientation meeting. For those potential participants who were unable to attend the informational meeting, the researcher hosted three additional virtual informational meetings using Adobe Connect so that potential participants could gain necessary information about the research study.

The researcher created an agenda (Appendix O) of items that would be discussed with the potential participants. The agenda included an introduction from the researcher, request to complete the sign-in form for the event, a short inspirational video stating the need for the research, a description of the study and the necessary interviews and observations, a discussion of IRB approval from Brandman University, recognition of the researcher’s certificate to protect the confidentiality of all participants, a review of the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights (Appendix P), a reminder of voluntary participation, a question-and-answer session, and a request for signature to indicate informed consent.

On the day of the orientation meeting for each school site, the researcher arrived early to the location to greet the potential participants and set up the materials for the meeting.

At the conclusion of the two orientation/virtual meetings, the researcher had secured participation from at least three students and family members from each PSE setting, who agreed to participate in observations and interviews regarding their experience in PSE as students with ID. The researcher collected the signed informed consent forms and permission to record the interviews (Appendix G) from those who
agreed to participate in the research. Although the researcher chose to solicit students with ID who were nonconserved adults and maintained their own rights for decision making, the researcher took additional precautions to protect the confidentiality and safety of the students with ID by requesting that the students consult with a family member about the study before signing the informed consent form giving permission to participate.

The researcher collected contact information (Appendix Q) for each of the student participants, their family members, nondisabled peers, and other faculty who agreed to be part of the study. The contact information was then transferred to the researcher’s e-mail so that individual and group contact would commence. The following three sections include the systematic procedures used by the researcher to set up data collection.

**Interviews.** The interviews with the PSE administrators, faculty members who taught classes in which students with ID were enrolled, students with ID, and at least one family member of each student were conducted in individual meetings or through private phone calls. Additionally, there was an option for nondisabled peers, mentors, and other faculty/staff members who had supported students with ID in PSE to participate in a focus group interview. The focus group was scheduled by the director of the PSE program in a secure location where the participants felt comfortable. For those unable to participate in the focus group, an individual interview or private phone call was conducted. The process for completing the interviews was as follows:

- The researcher contacted the director/administrator, students, family members, and focus group participants from the PSE programs for students with ID by e-mail to
introduce herself and request their participation in this important research (Appendix M).

- The researcher followed up with an e-mail if she had not heard back from the potential participants within 48 hours (Appendix R).

- Once a dialogue began with the participants, the researcher set up the meeting times and places for the interviews. A copy of the interview questions (Appendices B-E) was sent by e-mail at least 48 hours before the interviews.

- The researcher requested that at the time of their interviews, the participants bring evidence for review as artifacts (e.g., student transcript, syllabus, program brochure, etc.).

- The researcher e-mailed the participants 24 hours prior to the interviews to confirm.

- The researcher conducted the interviews (audio recorded).

- The researcher sent the recorded interviews for transcription.

- The researcher reviewed the transcribed interviews once they were returned to her.

- The researcher allowed the participants to review their transcriptions for accuracy and feedback.

- The researcher determined if any additional follow-up was necessary and contacted the appropriate participants if needed.

- The researcher conducted follow-up interviews if needed.

- The researcher created secured folders within her computer and named the transcribed interviews by the pseudonyms of the participants in preparation to code the data.
**Observations.** For each student participant, two observations were conducted: one in a classroom setting and one in a social or work setting of the student’s choice. The process for conducting the observations was as follows:

- The researcher contacted the students by e-mail and requested their response regarding the settings to be observed.
- The researcher followed up with an e-mail if she had not heard back from the participants within 48 hours (Appendix R).
- Once a dialogue began with the participants, the researcher set up the observation times and places.
- The researcher e-mailed the participants 24 hours prior to the observations to confirm.
- The researcher conducted the observations (Appendix F).
- The researcher reviewed the observation logs once completed.
- The researcher determined if any additional follow-up was necessary and contacted the appropriate participants if needed.
- The researcher conducted follow-up observations if needed.
- The researcher created secured folders within her computer and named the scanned observation logs by the pseudonyms of the participants in preparation to code the data.

**Artifact reviews.** Artifacts were collected from each PSE setting to reflect the program description, syllabus for at least one course offered, student transcripts, student work samples, and work experience documents. The following list describes the steps the researcher took to initiate the collection of the data:

- The researcher contacted the director/administrator, students, family members, and focus group participants from the PSE programs for students with ID by e-mail to
introduce herself and request their participation in this important research (Appendix M).

- The researcher followed up with an e-mail if she had not heard back from the potential participants within 48 hours (Appendix R).

- Once a dialogue began with the participants, the researcher set up the meeting times and places for the interviews. A copy of the interview questions (Appendices B-E) was sent by e-mail at least 48 hours before the interviews.

- The researcher requested that at the time of their interviews, the participants bring evidence for review as artifacts (e.g., student transcript, syllabus, program brochure, etc.).

- Once the interviews were completed, the researcher requested to take any artifacts the participants had.

- The researcher reviewed the artifacts collected.

- The researcher determined if any additional follow-up was necessary and contacted the appropriate participants if needed.

- The researcher conducted follow-up artifact reviews if needed.

- The researcher created secured folders within her computer and named the artifacts collected according to the PSE sites they were collected from in preparation to code the data.

The researcher used a secure, password-protected software tool on the computer to organize the steps for data collection such as individual participants, confirmation of signed informed consent forms, progress with necessary items required based on the role of the participants, transcription of interviews and review of transcriptions, and additional
follow-up. The software served as a support for the researcher to visualize the process for data collection and where each participant was in the process at any given time. The software included a section where the researcher indicated when each participant had completed what was necessary for data collection.

Data Analysis

According to Wolcott (2008), the analysis of qualitative data requires that the researcher reviews and sorts the data into “bits” and then into broad categories where themes and trends emerge. Consistent, in-depth interaction and review with the data provided the researcher with a sense of embodying the data where then codes emerged (Lofland et al., 2006). Finding a way through the forest of data requires deep thought and reflection on the data collected, analysis of the interaction amongst the pieces of data through triangulation, and the identification of patterns that emerge (Fettermen, 2010).

Finally, the last five of the 12 core strategies of qualitative inquiry were considered for analysis and reporting strategies. The researcher deliberated the uniqueness of the individuals studied, immersion and synthesis of the patterns and relationships between themes; took a holistic approach, understanding that the sum of all parts of data was greater than the whole; reflected regarding the context in which the data were collected; and remained cognizant of her own perspective and voice as the ethnographer as an instrument (Patton, 2015).

Coding of Data

According to Creswell (2012), to accurately code the data collected, first the researcher must spend ample time “being” with the data through review, readings, skimming, and rereading to begin to identify the themes that emerge from deep reflection
on the data. Once the themes in this study were created, the transcribed interviews, observation logs, and artifacts were coded using NVivo software. The software kept an accurate count of the frequency of the themes. Furthermore, following the suggestion by Creswell, the researcher spent additional time listening to the recorded interviews and following along with the transcribed responses while referring to the anecdotal, observational notes that the researcher had made during the interviews on a separate observation log. This strategy helped the researcher relive the interview experience and draw from the recalled nonverbal behavior that was presented by the participants during the interviews and the observations (Creswell, 2012). Additional time was spent by the researcher reviewing the themes and frequency counts for the codes that were identified.

**Analysis of Data**

In order to gain a deeper meaning from the analysis of the themes and codes that emerged, the researcher used triangulation to test the reliability of one source of information against another to thin out alternative descriptions in an attempt to answer the research question (Fetterman, 2010). The goal of the researcher was to analyze the themes that emerged based on the depth of frequency from the codes in the data that supported answering the research question. In order to more fully answer the research question, the researcher needed to not only analyze the themes but also triangulate the other data types to expose a richer story (Creswell, 2012).

According to Patton (2015), ethnographic triangulation serves as a means to promote quality research and reliable results that another researcher could consider for additional study. The researcher triangulated the data from interviews, observations, and artifact examination to gain insight on how students with ID can experience a high level
of success in PSE settings and to capture the meaning of the lived experiences that led to success in adulthood, employment, and overall independence. Lastly, the researcher had 10% of the collective data double-scored by an unbiased individual to check for reliability of frequency of the codes.

**Limitations**

This study had strength because the concept of investing in all students for PSE was still new to the field of education (Johnson, 2011). Understanding how students with ID could be successful in college was not even considered an option by most people, except within the last 5 to 10 years. According to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, colleges and universities have been challenged with the task of shifting mindset and culture in regard to servicing students of all abilities and disabilities. Beginning with research in the area of understanding the experiences of current, trendsetting professors and instructors at the college level who are embracing all students in the postsecondary classroom would be powerful information for other colleges and universities to learn from, especially when federal law requires that colleges and universities need to become more inclusive rather than exclusive (HEOA, 2008).

The current study was limited in its results because the lived experiences and themes drawn only considered those who were already teaching students with ID in PSE and students who were currently enrolled in PSE settings. As cited in many of the seminal studies reviewed in Chapter II, the professors have often been hand-selected to pilot the programs and were, most likely, already masters of “thinking outside of the box” regarding dynamic instruction for all individuals in the classroom, including those with ID. Most of the current instructors who support programs for students with ID in PSE
were part of the movement to convince their college or university to buy in to the concept. Additionally, the following limitations were considered by the researcher, and consideration for how the limitations were mitigated is described:

1. Sample size: Considering that only three PSE settings and nine total students with ID were selected as the focus of the research, this might have led to individual collection of data rather than what the data truly represent for the larger culture group of students with ID in PSE settings. However, in an effort to minimize the risks of a smaller sample size, the researcher conducted lengthy interviews, observations, and reviews of artifacts in order to substantiate the results of the data that would reflect the culture of the group studied.

2. Time spent interviewing and observing: The researcher spent a total of 12 to 14 weeks interviewing and observing the students with ID and the faculty, staff, and nondisabled peers who interacted with them on the PSE campuses; however, the limitation of time to conduct the research may have impacted the overall snapshot of the data collected during the time they were gathered. In an effort to minimize the limitation, the researcher spent additional time before and after each observation as a participant in the activity to build relationships and trust with the individuals studied.

3. Bias of the researcher: Using the methodology of ethnography required that the researcher become the eyes and ears of the study as an active participant in data collection and reflection of the themes that emerged through the triangulation of data (Wolcott, 2008). The researcher made careful ethical considerations of the participants and a conscious effort to remain nonjudgmental during interviews and
objective during observations to reduce the risk of the limitation of the researcher serving as an instrument.

Summary

The qualitative research design allowed the researcher to dig deep into the meaning of human experiences and make sense of those experiences based on the environments in which they occurred (Patton, 2015). Chapter III defined the purpose of the study, the research question, the qualitative research design using ethnography as a methodology, the population and sample for the study, the instruments used to conduct the research, how validity and reliability of the instruments were established to produce accurate and reliable results, the process for collection and analysis of data, and limitations to the study. The researcher aimed to answer the research question through careful examination of the instruments and the data collected. The researcher identified common themes that described the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE settings so that other students, who might be considering PSE, feel encouraged to take the next step in exploring higher education.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

It was the intention of the researcher to examine, understand, and describe the lived experiences of students with intellectual disabilities (ID) in postsecondary education (PSE) settings in order to understand what their college experience was like. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is interpretive, as the researcher gathers the data and, through extensive review and examination of the data, recognizes common themes and uses descriptive stories to describe the commonality of the data collected. This chapter describes the results of the stories shared by the participants in the research study. The chapter includes an overview of the study, the purpose statement and research question, research methods and data collection procedures, the population, the research sample, demographic data, the presentation of the findings according to the themes as they relate to the eight standards of the Think College framework for inclusive higher education, and a summary of the findings.

Overview

Strong qualitative inquiry involves successful completion of gathering, focusing, and analyzing the data (Lofland et al., 2006). The instruments used to gather the data in this study were the most important in the process because otherwise the researcher would have had nothing to focus or analyze. In order to answer the research question, the researcher used interviews, observations, and a review of artifacts to understand the lived experiences of students with ID participating in PSE. This chapter presents the methods by which the researcher collected and analyzed the data from the interviews, observations, and artifacts. The results of the data revealed 13 themes in alignment with the eight standards from the Think College framework for inclusive higher education.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to examine and describe the lived experiences of seven students with intellectual disabilities (ID) participating in two postsecondary education (PSE) settings in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education.

Research Question

This study was guided by one central question designed to explore the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education, to investigate and examine the lived experiences of students with ID participating in PSE settings in Southern California. The research question for this study was as follows: What were the lived experiences of students with ID participating in PSE programs in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

The researcher sought to tell the story of the experiences of students with ID in PSE beginning with the students’ voices, but the stories were enriched from the perspectives of others surrounding the PSE community who saw the students’ contributions as meaningful. Ethnography was flexible and resilient to exposing the truths through the interviews with participants as well as the examination of the artifacts gathered to examine the lived experiences and created culture of the group of students with ID in PSE (Fetterman, 2010).

After the researcher had identified the participants for the study, the following methods were used to collect all of the data necessary to tell the fullest and most
meaningful stories of students with ID participating in PSE settings in Southern California. Over the course of 12 to 14 weeks between the months of September and December 2016,

• The researcher spent a total of 12 full days of direct time at UCLA and Taft College.
• The researcher conducted over 28 hours of recorded interviews with participants.
  o Individual interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 1.5 hours.
• The researcher completed 25.5 hours of direct student observations.
  o Each student was observed a minimum of twice (once in an academic setting and once in either a vocational or recreational setting).
  o Individual observations lasted 30 minutes to 1.5 hours.
• The researcher dedicated 30 hours of inclusive observation time on the two campuses attempting to immerse in the culture of the PSE setting.
  o This time included tours and informal observations of classrooms, campus resources and facilities, natural environmental supports, and observations of relationships and interactions of PSE staff and students.

Population

The PSE settings identified for the study were Pathway at UCLA and the Transition to Independent Living (TIL) program at Taft College in Taft, California. Pathway and TIL were selected because they were well-established programs and were within a reasonable distance (convenience sampling) for the researcher to travel to as often as needed to collect data, complete observations, and conduct interviews with students with ID and stakeholders who supported the PSE programs. Pathway at UCLA
represented a major university setting, and TIL at Taft represented a community college setting.

**Sample**

Convenience sampling was considered by the researcher because it reflected the available group of subjects who were accessible to the researcher and were within a reasonable distance to conduct multiple in-person interviews and observations (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The primary purpose of the research was to better understand lived experiences and the outcomes from them; therefore, convenience sampling was appropriate to use because the participants were representative of the population studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). There were 24 participants who completed the process according to the data collection procedures described. The participants included seven students, seven family members of the students, two program directors, two program managers, two program staff members (student support or assistance), two college/university faculty/professors, and two college students/nondisabled peers.

**Demographic Data**

The study included 24 participants who met the criteria to be eligible to participate and who signed informed consent forms. Table 2 represents demographic data that describe individual qualities of the participants related to how they participated in the study. Participants are listed alphabetically by first name.

**Presentation and Analysis of Data**

After more than 3 months of data collection, reflection, interpretation, discovery of meaning, and evolution of themes related to the students’ experiences, the researcher organized the data into 13 themes and showed alignment of the themes to the eight
Table 2

*Research Participant Demographic Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant pseudonym</th>
<th>Age (if stated)</th>
<th>Role in the study</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Program of discussion</th>
<th>Years at program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Family member</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Pathway</td>
<td>Student 2nd year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Family member</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>TIL</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>TIL</td>
<td>1st year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. B</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pathway</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Pathway</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>TIL</td>
<td>1st year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. C</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Family member</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Pathway</td>
<td>Student 2nd year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calvin</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>TIL</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craven Crowraven</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>TIL</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derek</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Family member</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>TIL</td>
<td>Student 1st year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancer Girl</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>TIL</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Family member</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>TIL</td>
<td>Student 2nd year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. F</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Family member</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>TIL</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicia</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TIL</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gizmo</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Pathway</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Pathway</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>TIL</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pathway</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pathway</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. P</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Family member</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Pathway</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Q</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pathway</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>TIL</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarlet Downey</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Pathway</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thor</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Pathway</td>
<td>2nd year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. NDP = nondisabled peer.*
standards of the Think College framework for inclusive higher education. The researcher used the data collected to answer the research question.

The following lived experiences of students with ID in PSE programs in Southern California were aligned to the Think College standards for inclusive higher education:

1. opened new opportunities,
2. was meaningful,
3. created independence,
4. created determination and self-advocacy,
5. provided vocational skills for adulthood,
6. increased socialization and deepened relationships,
7. created a connection to community,
8. was similar to other college students,
9. was challenging,
10. was a confidence builder,
11. was learning to work with others,
12. was motivating, and
13. was beneficial for all/others.

As recommended by Creswell (2012), the researcher employed the data collection strategy using the “bottom-up” method that began by organizing how the data would be sought after, and then the researcher collected the data, transcribed the data, reread the data, and reflected on the evidence gathered to watch for emerging similarities and themes. The researcher organized the stories of the participants based on the themes that were most prevalent and has retold the stories to highlight the most important results and
the strongest data that represent the lived experiences of students with ID who participated in PSE.

Figure 6 represents the 13 themes in relationship to the Think College standards in order of frequency of theme. Themes that had a frequency of at least 100 were considered the top themes that highlighted the lived experiences of the students with ID in PSE. All eight Think College standards related to at least one of the top eight high-frequency themes. Seven of the Think College standards related to two or more of the top themes that emerged regarding the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE. Four of the Think College standards (Standards 2, 4, 5, and 6) related to at least three of the top eight themes, and Standard 5 related to five of the top eight themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Standard(s) Referenced</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opened new opportunities</td>
<td>4 (St. 1, 2, 5, &amp; 7)</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was meaningful</td>
<td>3 (St. 5, 6, &amp; 8)</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created Independence</td>
<td>2 (St. 1 &amp; 4)</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of determination and self-advocacy</td>
<td>2 (St. 2 &amp; 4)</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided vocational skills for adulthood</td>
<td>2 (St. 2 &amp; 5)</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased socialization and deepened</td>
<td>3 (St. 3, 5 &amp; 6)</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created a connection to community</td>
<td>2 (St. 3 &amp; 6)</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was similar to other college students</td>
<td>3 (St. 4, 5 &amp; 7)</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was challenging</td>
<td>2 (St. 1 &amp; 3)</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was a confidence builder</td>
<td>2 (St. 1 &amp; 2)</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was learning to work with others</td>
<td>2 (St. 1 &amp; 3)</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was motivating</td>
<td>1 (St. 4)</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was beneficial for all others</td>
<td>1 (St. 8)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 6. Cross reference of themes related to standards and frequency count.*

Figure 7 represents the breakdown of the type of data that contributed to the themes. The majority of the data collected came from the interviews with the participants. Observations contributed significantly to all themes except Theme 9 (was challenging) and minimally to Themes 5 (provided vocational skills for adulthood) and
13 (was beneficial for all/others) due to the settings that the students were observed in being selected by the students for the researcher, and thus the researcher did not observe any challenging situations. The researcher also only observed two students in vocational settings, and therefore observations of vocational training were not highly reflected in the data. Table 3 breaks down the 25.5 hours of direct observations with the students and the settings in which they were observed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Total pieces of Evidence</th>
<th>Interviews-Pathway</th>
<th>Interviews-TIL</th>
<th>Observations-Pathway</th>
<th>Observations-TIL</th>
<th>Artifacts-Pathway</th>
<th>Artifacts-TIL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Opportunities</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was Meaningful</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created Independence</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Determination</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Skills for adulthood</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Socialization &amp; depended relationships</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to community</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar to other college students</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence Builder</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to work with others</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficial for all/others</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7. Type of data that contributed to the themes. More than 50 pieces of evidence were collected between interviews, observations, and artifacts that the researcher used to uncover themes of the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE.
Table 3

**Student Observations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Academic hours observed</th>
<th>Vocational hours observed</th>
<th>Recreational hours observed</th>
<th>Total hours of observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>2 (life skills)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2 (community event)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>2 (functional skills)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2 (student lounge)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craven Crowraven</td>
<td>1.5 (life skills)</td>
<td>1.5 (food service)</td>
<td>0.5 (community event)</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancer Girl</td>
<td>1 (transition skills)</td>
<td>2 (child care)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gizmo</td>
<td>1.5 (photography)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2.5 (grocery shopping &amp; campus)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarlet Downey</td>
<td>1.5 (history)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2.5 (apartment &amp; college campus)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thor</td>
<td>1.5 (martial arts)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1.5 (community)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. This table represents the time that the researcher spent with each student with ID in PSE according to the setting where the observation occurred. A total of 25.5 hours were spent in direct observation of the students with ID in PSE.

The overall frequency of Theme 5 (provided vocational skills for adulthood), as noted in Figure 7, was high due to the stories about vocational experiences that were shared by the participants. It is important to note that although there seems to be a significant difference between the number of artifacts from Pathway and TIL used to triangulate the data, the artifacts provided by TIL were given as one large document, whereas the items from Pathway were individual documents. The number of pieces of evidence when comparing artifacts for Pathway and TIL should not be considered as one weighing more heavily than the other because of how the artifacts were presented to the researcher at the time of data collection.
Figure 8 represents the number of themes that emerged from stories from the participants that resonated with the description of each of the eight Think College standards. The researcher did not evaluate the standards but more so uncovered the student experiences based on the stories as they related to the Think College framework for inclusive higher education.

Cross Reference of Alignment of Standard to Theme:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th># of Themes Related</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Access</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Development</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Determination</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Membership</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Systems/Practices</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination &amp; Collaboration</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing Evaluation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8. Cross reference of alignment of standards to themes.*

In Figure 9, the researcher presents the results of how the themes that emerged from the stories of the participants relate to the eight Think College standards. The figure displays the Think College standards as they relate to the 13 overall themes from the stories that told of the experiences of students with ID in PSE. Of the 13 themes that emerged from the data collected by the researcher, certain themes aligned with each of the eight Think College standards according to the stories that the participants shared. The themes, as shown in Figure 9, resonated with the goals of the individual standards according to the quality indicators of the Think College framework.

**Presentation of Themes Related to Think College Standards**

The following sections of Chapter IV follow the outline of Figure 9 to highlight the stories of the participants as they came alive within the standards. Each standard is
described according to the related themes that emerged in the data from the stories, and each theme is broken down to show the relationship of the stories shared by the participants to the overall category for each Think College standard.

**Standard 1: Academic Access**

Standard 1 addressed the issue related to inclusive, high-quality academic access to a wide range of courses attended by nondisabled students. It included three quality indicators and 15 benchmarks that assessed course participation and skills for lifelong learning (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011). Academic access for students with ID meant that the students had the opportunity to take credit or noncredit courses alongside other
disabled and nondisabled peers as well as had access to the same campus resources that all students could access, such as technology, student services, transportation, food and housing, and openings for adult learning opportunities (Weir et al., 2013).

According to the data collected by the researcher as related to Standard 1: Academic Access, the lived experiences of the students with ID in PSE created new opportunities and independence, were sometimes challenging, built confidence, and helped them learn to work with others.

**Students gained new opportunities.** One way students continued to achieve academic success was through new opportunities. The lived experiences of students with ID in PSE that created new opportunities were referenced 192 times throughout the data. The researcher spoke with a family member of one of the students with ID, Mrs. C, and when she was asked about what she imagined for her child after high school, she said,

> Personally, I never thought that I would get to see the day of my kids going to college. I didn’t think that was ever going to be a possibility or an option. I feel like they’re trailblazers, and it made me excited to see that they are able to do that. It’s a proud moment for a parent to get to see that their child is getting to be something.

The concept of students with ID accessing PSE is relatively new since the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008 and the conception of Think College in 2010; with the exception of a handful of colleges and universities that were open to the idea, students with ID accessing PSE to further their educational experiences and impact their adult lives afterward was a progressive and innovative concept (Simonsen & Neubert, 2013). According to Michelle, a nondisabled peer, access to new opportunities
for students with ID in PSE “is important for their story to be heard . . . it’s as important as they think it is, and I think that the story itself is important.”

**Students created independence.** In addition to new opportunities in academic access, as supported by the data collected, students with ID in PSE gained independence. This theme was referenced 174 times throughout the data, and all 24 participants mentioned in their interviews the significance of the independence that the students with ID in PSE achieved. According to Dancer Girl, because of the experience she had in college, she will “be more independent, and I’ll learn as I go, but I pretty much know what to do because the program’s taught me the steps to be successful in life.” Of the seven students who participated in the study, all made mention of the increased independence that they had achieved and how they looked forward to applying the independent skills they learned in college to their adult lives once they left college.

Additionally, Samantha described the unbelievable change that the students experienced while accessing college so much that “our graduates, that is, they go through the program, they are living independently, they’re working, and all their situations are different, but they are a changed human being when they leave us.”

**Students experienced challenges.** The access to new opportunities and increased independence highlighted the lived experiences of the students with ID in PSE, but the students also experienced some challenges. Although the theme of challenges that the students with ID faced in PSE was only exposed 96 times in the data collected, the most common participants to express challenges were the students themselves. For example, Gizmo described the life skills she “was learning about, like how to do things, money management, and how to budget and save our money. Learning how to do those things
on my own was hard.” Another student, Anonymous, described his challenges, “like we’re gonna go through ups and downs, but we’re learning a lot of new things.”

According to the data collected, other challenges that the students expressed surrounded learning to live in a new environment away from home, learning to study on their own, navigating conflict resolution with roommates, knowing whom to trust when in need of help, and learning how to overcome unexpected challenges.

Student confidence was boosted. Overcoming challenges proved to affect the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE because it helped them build confidence. According to Calvin, a student once shared with him about her desire to make something of herself and be confident in who she was. Calvin shared how this particular student fell in love during college, and both students planned their wedding. Without either of those students having the opportunity to access college, they would have never met. He stated, “Planning her wedding was huge. And for both of them to graduate and be successful and maintain their careers now, it’s awesome.” Calvin described that confidence for students with disabilities manifests differently than it does for those who are not disabled. He said,

When you think about individuals growing up without disabilities, you think about them planning their own weddings, getting jobs, living on their own as a couple and being successful; it’s not something you think about when you have a disabled child. But our students all have the same drives, desires, and abilities. It’s just [that] there are different paths to achieve those goals.

Students learned to work with others. Along with access to new academic opportunities, increased independence, overcoming challenges, and building confidence,
the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE taught the students to learn to effectively work with others. All participants shared stories of how they learned to work with others in college, from dealing with a messy roommate to sharing a project or homework assignment, to navigating social situations with peers and adults. Bob described his most fun experience as being around new peers and meeting new people. He said that he enjoyed being in regular classes so that he could learn from others, but he described what he most liked about the college experience was that “we learn new stuff every day, and they’re [instructors are] very hands-on if we need help.”

**Standard 2: Career Development**

Standard 2 addressed the critical aspect of career development that would lead to integrated, competitive employment upon completion of the PSE program. It included one quality indicator and seven benchmarks (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011). In order to develop the students’ skills for vocational experiences and career awareness, the students need to be involved in the process by identifying their own career goals, have exposure to multiple vocational environments, and have a support system of people helping to guide them toward their career goals (Weir et al., 2013).

According to the data collected by the researcher as related to Standard 2: Career Development, the lived experiences of the students with ID in PSE created new opportunities for vocational development, encouraged a sense of determination and self-advocacy, developed their vocational skills for adulthood, and continued to build their confidence. The following sections for Standard 2 highlight the experiences of the study participants related to career development skills.
**Students gained new opportunities.** Not only did students with ID gain new opportunities in academic access according to Standard 1, but they also gained new opportunities to explore and develop career-readiness skills. According to the data the researcher collected, multiple participants spoke of how a college experience for students with ID also created new opportunities for them to explore career paths and gain experience in order to become successful adults. Specifically, when the researcher spoke with Bob, the director of Pathway, his thoughts on new opportunities in college for students with ID encompassed the collective thoughts of all the participants. He shared,

I consider myself a lifelong learner. Why shouldn’t people with intellectual disabilities have those same opportunities? Including using education to help get a better job, earn more money, using education as a way to achieve more, better oneself, or just have a fuller life.

**Students gained determination and self-advocacy.** New opportunities for students with ID to showcase their talent to employers who would have previously never given them a chance is what promoted a sense of determination and self-advocacy for the students with ID who participated in a college experience. This theme was the fourth strongest according to the data. It was documented 152 times and was the strongest theme amongst observations and artifacts combined. According to Thor, his vocational experiences increased his sense of determination, but this came at a cost of feeling that he had something to prove to employers. He talked about being thankful for the job opportunity but stated that he felt he was always looked at differently or that the employer had false expectations of his capability, and it sometimes was more discouraging to his sense of determination than it was uplifting. He shared,
Sometimes it does affect me because when I get turned down too many times, I think that some people don’t have need of a job at all. Because they might think that you’re not capable of it. I’m capable because I’m hardworking, and I get the job done. I never quit.

Thor was not the only student who shared about feeling like he constantly had something to prove because he had a disability. Another student, Anonymous, described his sense of determination in his job search as follows: “I just wanted to give it a shot. I realized about myself that I can’t do the job unless you show it [to] me instead of telling me.”

**Students expanded vocational skills for adulthood.** The determination that students with ID in PSE showed while developing their career awareness expanded their vocational skills through perseverance. Developing the students’ career awareness began with exposure to multiple vocational experiences that provided them with the opportunity to do a job they never thought about before. This theme was represented in the data 147 times, making it the fifth strongest of the 13 total themes that emerged from the data.

Both Pathway and TIL had internships as part of the programs that encouraged the students to learn skills for careers that were in an area of interest to them as well as explore careers outside their comfort zone. Craven Crowraven described how the internship that she had was helpful: “We have a job, and we work three times a week for 2 hours, and it’s really awesome because you get to see all the different job opportunities that are out there.”

All the students who were interviewed described how their internships had helped them learn skills they would have not expected to be good at before they learned them.
One student, Bob, described how much he loved sports and that he would like to become a sportscaster. When the researcher asked him what kind of skills he thought he would need to become a sportscaster, he stated, “Better vocabulary, writing, and just working on my speech more.” Bob went on to explain how the director at TIL learned of his desire and offered him the opportunity to speak in front of the local city council as a representative of the TIL program. Bob described how nervous he was about the speech, but he told the researcher that he was overwhelmed by the support he received from the staff to be successful in the speech. Bob stated that he knew that by doing the speech at the city council, he would feel encouraged about pursuing more public speaking opportunities as practice for being a sportscaster.

**Student confidence was boosted.** The vocational internships that the students with ID experienced in college opened doors to new career opportunities they had not previously considered, supported their self-advocacy skills, and built their confidence to try new skills and tackle challenges that came their way. Although the confidence-builder theme only occurred 85 times in the data, the confidence built was recognized both by the students themselves and the staff who surrounded them.

According to Thor, a student whose response was described earlier regarding some of his frustration with employers seeing him for his ability versus his disability, the opportunities he had at the UCLA Medical Center as part of his internship increased his confidence. He stated, “It’s pretty new and exciting. New challenges coming your way. I’m always prepared for a challenge.”

Multiple participants, including the students themselves, commented about feeling like they were constantly underestimated by others. Felicia, the director of TIL,
acknowledged the students’ feelings but shared that it is up to others who know the students’ abilities to help advocate for them so that they are seen for what they can contribute, which in turn would boost the students’ confidence when others recognized their ability first. Felicia stated, “They’re way more able than we have ever given them credit for.”

**Standard 3: Campus Membership**

Standard 3 addressed the importance of campus life and campus membership through related clubs, sports, or social events, which should include access to facilities and technology to support learning. It included one quality indicator and three benchmarks to evaluate how the students perceive their development in the college campus community (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011). A college experience included students’ involvement in campus activities, inclusive housing opportunities on- and off-campus to be socialized with other nondisabled peers, and social activities that served as natural supports in the campus environment (Weir et al., 2013).

According to the data collected by the researcher as related to Standard 3: Campus Membership, the lived experiences of the students with ID in PSE increased socialization and deepened relationships with other disabled and nondisabled peers as well as connected the students to the community where they lived, but they also posed challenges when the students were learning to work with other people in the classes they took or the campus activities in which they participated in their local community.

**Students increased socialization and deepened relationships.** One way that students were included as part of the college campus was through new opportunities for socialization in campus activities. This socialization began the process of developing
relationships between the students and both abled and disabled peers. Students with ID participating in PSE forged new relationships with others by joining a new community and by engaging in college campus activities that were inclusive. In the stories gathered from participants, this theme was referenced 130 times, making it the sixth strongest theme of the 13 total that emerged.

According to Ms. B, a program manager, the students in the residential programs have more opportunities to be exposed to natural events such as meeting other college students because they live in the same building. Ms. B explained that oftentimes the students would meet up for dinner or go out to a movie, but sometimes students would feel apprehensive about venturing out, so the program staff would encourage them to be brave. She stated that the staff would tell the students with ID, “We’re not going to tell you when and where you have to be. That’s up to you to decide. But we do hope that you don’t choose to spend that time locked up in your apartment.”

According to the data collected by the researcher at both college campuses, there were significant references to the increased socialization and relationships that were formed between the students with ID and nondisabled peers through the athletic programs and classes offered. The students with ID spent a substantial amount of time watching sporting events such as college football games at the Rose Bowl (UCLA football team home field), taking martial arts classes and gymnastics, and socializing with athletes in the cafeteria, library, or student lounges around campus. The data collected from all of the students with ID indicated that they enjoyed spending time on the campus, being part of the campus life. Anonymous described his time on campus as follows: “Well, I
usually just hang out with friends, probably just sit and relax in the lounge, listen to music, or watch movies, or sometimes I just walk around for a little bit before class.”

**Students connected to the community.** Campus membership also included how the students were connected to the surrounding community. According to the data collected by the researcher, the lived experiences of the students with ID in college were influenced by the time spent not only on the college campus but also in the surrounding community. This theme was represented 119 times in the data collected and was highly evident in the observations conducted with the students due to the students’ decisions for the researcher to observe them in recreational and leisure activities. Five of the seven students with ID who participated in the study requested that the researcher observe their ability to navigate the community around the college campus but close to where they lived. During the observations, the researcher noted that the students showed confidence in navigating their surroundings and would stop to talk with people in the community to say “hello.”

In his interview, a professor at UCLA, Luke, discussed what it was like seeing the students around the community of the college campus itself. The researcher asked what Luke thought was the perception of the students with ID participating on UCLA’s campus, and he responded,

> It’s just, “Okay, this is good.” I don’t think anybody has a negative opinion—would have a negative opinion about this kind of a program. It’s just, “Okay, it’s just part of our UCLA life here. They’re part of the community as much as any one of us are.” I think that’s how people would feel. I mean, I can say—and that’s how I feel.
Several other participants shared about how the amount of community awareness for those with disabilities was increasing, and there was a heightened sense of need for an inclusive community mindset. Ms. B shared, “There’s a lot about community relations increasing the inclusivity rate for all of our students, looking for more opportunities on campus and how we can decrease the amount of restrictive classes and increase the opportunities on campus.”

**Students experienced challenges.** Connecting students with ID to the campus and surrounding community presented some challenges. Challenges were not significantly noted in the data collected and were not noted with any frequency through the observations or artifacts reviewed; however, several of the students interviewed noted that they had difficulty navigating the campus. Gizmo felt it was a challenge to learn to do things on her own, such as finding where her classes were on campus. She also expressed that in her general studies class, Black Holes, she had difficulty feeling like she belonged because she did not know anyone in the class. Regardless of her challenges, she expressed that she was glad she made the decision to go to college because “I get to do something on my own that I don’t get to do at home.”

The researcher asked Bob, the Pathway program director, what he thought about how the students with ID in PSE were challenged by being part of the college campus and community, and he responded,

That is a real challenge, because you can’t necessarily force people to get involved in something. You have to create the opportunity so that they can pursue it. When they are inclusive or participate in activities that are inclusive,
they meet other people. That’s really what we’re trying to set—the environment where that can happen.

**Students learned to work with others.** Campus membership involved increased socialization and deepened relationships with others, feeling connected to the surrounding community, and overcoming the challenges that presented themselves in the natural environment, but ultimately, the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE taught the students how to effectively work with others on the campus and in the community.

Being part of the college campus involved learning to work with others. This theme was referenced 71 times in the data but was most noted from the students’ perspective regarding how they perceived themselves as part of the student body. Scarlet Downey described that it was difficult for her to be open with other students about her disability because she did not know how the other students would perceive her. Scarlet discussed that when she was in a general education class, she was nervous about how she would interact with other students because of the effects of her disability. She stated, “Sometimes when I speak, I say things the wrong way, because I’m very blunt and I don’t always understand the nuances of little things. . . . Apparently, sometimes that’s offensive.” Scarlet went on to describe how she learned to overcome her fear of working with others by involving herself in study groups with peers in her class. She said, “Working with people and doing stuff like that where you’re supposed to get that stuff in college too. I think that’s what everyone gets in college. And so, I’m getting an opportunity to experience that and just learn.”
Standard 4: Self-Determination

Standard 4 addressed the development of self-determination and a sense of personal goals while participating in PSE. It included three quality indicators and 15 benchmarks to dig deep into how the PSE program encourages self-advocacy, person-centered planning, and self-directed learning (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011). Evidence of self-determination included outcomes based on the students’ interests but reflected support from family members. This standard included ongoing development for the students with ID to monitor their own progress, be involved in course registration, interact with faculty for necessary accommodations, and ultimately show control over their own personal schedules for academics, employment, and independent activities (Weir et al., 2013).

According to the data collected by the researcher as related to Standard 4: Self-Determination, the lived experiences of the students with ID in PSE created independence, showed determination and self-advocacy, were similar to those of other college students, and were motivating. The following sections for Standard 4 reference the self-determination skills developed by students with ID as a result of their participation in PSE.

Students created independence. As referenced under Standard 1: Academic Access, the theme of independence showed up heavily in terms of students’ desire for self-advocacy and self-determination as associated with Standard 4. Independence was referenced 174 times in the data collected and showed up in more than half of the student observations. Every student interview included references to how the students had created independence by making the decision to move away from home and attend
college, but the stories that the family members told also celebrated the pride that the family felt by having their students attend college and learn to live independently.

According to Gizmo, “It [college] has helped get me out more. That is how I got friends. I get to do something on my own that I didn’t get to do at home.” The researcher asked family members about the experiences they expected their students would have in college, and every family member’s response included a story about the student leading an independent life. Mr. A’s reflection captured the stories of the family members best:

We want them to make their own decisions. That’s what they’ve been doing. And so, I think that will prepare them to make their own decisions down the road without us always being there. We’re always there to support them and help them with their decisions and guide them, but we want them to be fully independent in making those decisions.

All of the students interviewed described a sense of nervousness they felt when first moving away from home. The researcher was curious about how that translated into the experiences they lived while in college, and so each student was asked what advice he or she would give to a student with ID who was considering going to college. The collective advice given by all of the students was best summed up by Bob:

The advice I’ll give them is to ask a lot of questions, not just to your life-skill aide but to any teacher or whoever that you know, and just try to be more independent on your own. Try to do more stuff on your own. For those who want to come in college, you should try it. At least try, I guess, even if you have a disability or not. So just try it and see if you like it.
He concluded his advice with a story about how he had learned that he can overcome any obstacle in his way, if he just puts his mind to it, and he believed that college should be viewed the same way. Bob stated that anyone who wants to go to college should have the opportunity, and people should not be discouraged or avoid college because “you think that you can’t because you’re disabled.”

**Students gained determination and self-advocacy.** Students with ID gained determination in PSE when they learned to advocate for experiences they desired to have. In terms of the number of individual pieces of data collected that referenced a particular theme, determination and self-advocacy had the most evidence that reflected similar trends in stories. Although multiple pieces of evidence reflected the theme of determination and self-advocacy, one student in particular best summed up the feeling of determination amongst the other students. Dancer Girl told the researcher a story about how she had always wanted to be seen for her ability and not have her family or anyone else worry that she would not be successful on her own. She described that her experience in college had made her determined to show them that she can do whatever she sets her mind to. Dancer Girl described this:

> It makes me feel like I’ve actually accomplished it, and I feel good inside, like I can do it on my own. I can prove to my parents and to the staff that I can be independent once I graduate the program.

**Students with ID had experiences that were similar to those of other college students.** Another factor that promoted self-determination for students with ID in PSE was reflected in the stories shared that indicated that typical college students had similar experiences. Data collected in the study presented as what were or could be similar
situations that many college students encounter, abled or disabled. The references collected totaled 118 reflections of how the lived experiences of students with ID in college were similar to those of college students who did not have an identified disability. The references came from both the student perspective and the nonstudent perspective of staff, family members, or nondisabled peers.

In reference to Standard 4: Self-Determination, a student, Scarlet Downey, best summarized the stories told by the other students who were determined to be seen just as any other college student. Scarlet told the researcher how she felt the college should view students with disabilities who desire to continue their learning in higher education. She described that any student who wished to go to college would have the same needs and told the researcher, “It’s just another student. Things have to be done a little differently, and it’s very similar to my viewpoint, where we’re going to get to the same place, we just might have to take a different route.”

**Students felt motivated.** Self-determination was amplified for the students with ID in PSE because they felt motivated to push the limits of their own ability. The students interviewed expressed that their college experiences had motivated them to continue learning and explore options in life that, before going to college, they had not considered, such as moving to a new community, beginning an intimate relationship, trying a job they had previously thought of as boring, or taking a class that they did not think they could be successful with. Furthermore, the students described their college experiences as motivating them to do more than what they had previously thought they could accomplish. One student, Craven Crowraven, was so motivated by her college experience that she told the researcher,
After here, I want to write a book about this place. And hopefully, people that don’t know about this program can research this program as well. My experience in college and the TIL program . . . my dream was to go to college and live on my own. It actually helped me because I feel like I’m living on my own, and I’m very far away from home.

**Standard 5: Alignment With College Systems and Practices**

Standard 5 addressed the alignment between the college systems and perceived outcomes for the students with ID to establish authentic experiences for the students to engage in as a critical part of learning. It included five quality indicators and 21 benchmarks to look at student credentials, academic progress, involvement of college faculty, and program policies and procedures (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011). Evidence of this standard would be included as a publicly available program description and outcomes for the participating students, engagement in the college community through student-directed goals, access to campus resources such as cocurricular activities, transportation within the community, recognition of the students with ID in an inclusive campus diversity plan, and the option for students with ID to participate in commencement ceremonies as a culminating activity of their college experience (Weir et al., 2013).

According to the data collected by the researcher as related to Standard 5: Alignment With College Systems and Practices, the lived experiences of the students with ID in PSE created new opportunities, were meaningful for their development, built vocational skills for adulthood, increased their socialization and deepened relationships, and were similar to the experiences of other nondisabled peers in college.
**Students gained new opportunities.** For the third time, new opportunities emerged as a theme that supported the Think College framework. New opportunities, as a result of the lived experiences of the students with ID in PSE, emerged in students’ access to academic settings in PSE, were significantly referenced in relation to career development, and represented how college systems and practices worked to promote higher education opportunities for students with ID, in alignment with Standard 5. The students who were interviewed did not have the background knowledge to understand the inner workings of the college system in which they participated; however, the stories told by the staff members of the college programs represented how the students’ lived experiences were impacted through the development of the programs.

The researcher asked Julie, a nondisabled peer who was familiar with students with disabilities on the college campus, what the students’ experience was like in college and what she thought about giving them the new opportunity in PSE. Julie stated, “They just want to fit in, and they want to be treated equally. I think they deserve that because we have to treat them the same way we want to be treated. That’s the golden rule.”

Multiple participants who were part of the college programs described how important it was for the colleges to have a collective mindset about serving and educating all types of learners, even learners who have not typically been part of a college environment. One participant, Calvin, stated the collective agreement of the participants best by describing how creating opportunities for all learners is what is best for everyone. He stated that giving students with ID an opportunity for a college experience is “what we can do to improve their quality of life. When you improve somebody’s quality of life,
you give them an opportunity to give back, and I think that’s important. I think we’re doing an injustice if we don’t.”

**Students had meaningful experiences.** The theme of meaningful experiences for students with ID in PSE showed up first under Standard 5 as described by participants who were nonstudents. Later in the data, stories from the students emerged in which they discussed how meaningful their individual college experiences were as it related to the collaborative effort of the stakeholders who supported them. According to those interviewed, the students’ lived experiences were meaningful from the perspective of the colleges because they represented experiences where the students felt accepted by the college community and engaged in college experiences where they could socialize with nondisabled peers.

Jessica, a professor in the TIL program, described why she felt that the social aspect of the students’ lived experiences was the most meaningful. She stated,

I think the biggest impact for our students is the social aspect. For so long, they were one person. Even if they had inclusive education [in secondary school], there was one person or two people who got removed for an hour or two for RSP [inclusion] or whatever. But here, they’re amongst their peers. This is an entire program of people similar to them. So for the first time, they’re just one of the group. They’re just one of the gang. And I think socially, that’s so impactful. They develop these lifelong friendships. We’ve even had students get married. So it’s this really powerful societal peer community that’s developed. And I think that is invaluable.
**Students expanded vocational skills for adulthood.** Another way that the experiences of the students with ID in PSE were in alignment with the college systems and practices was through the vocational internships made available to practice emerging job skills. According to the directors, program managers, and staff of the PSE programs that supported students with ID, it was through the partnerships built with local businesses that success in the stories of students learning vital vocational skills was seen. Calvin described a story of a past student who gained the skills necessary to be confident to speak in front of crowds of over 500 employees. Calvin stated that without the experience in college, that student would never have gained the skills to land her a job back in her home community where she is viewed as one of the most valuable employees.

**Students increased socialization and deepened relationships.** Alignment with college systems and practices by the staff who supported students with ID and their inclusion in the college community allowed for the students’ experiences to be enriched through new academic and vocational opportunities that were meaningful, and those experiences strengthened their vocational skills. However, because the colleges were invested in the experiences of all learners, it allowed for inclusive settings in which deep relationships formed between abled and disabled peers.

This theme was referenced 130 times in the data collected by the researcher. Ms. B discussed how the living opportunities for students in the program supported their independence and allowed them to forge new relationships with peers because they were living alongside other college students who were not disabled. Without that opportunity, Scarlet Downey would have never had the chance to build friendships with six nondisabled college roommates from whom she described herself as no different. Scarlet
told the researcher that some of her best memories were staying up late studying with her roommates during finals and that without the experience of living with nondisabled peers, she would not have had the relationships with those same people at the time of the study. Scarlet described that she did not want to be seen for her labeled disability. She asked that others “look at me for what I can do.” And according to Scarlet, her roommates did just that.

**Students had experiences that were similar to those of other college students.**

According to the Think College framework in reference to Standard 5, creating inclusive environments for students with ID in PSE is the responsibility of the college system (Weir et al., 2013). Stories from the participants in the study contained 118 references to experiences that were similar to those of other college students. According to Calvin, a staff member in the TIL program, students’ lived experiences in college are impacted by the opportunities they have to participate in activities like any other nondisabled college student. He believed, “It gives them an opportunity to engage in an activity that other young men and women have the chance to do. It opens up a doorway that they wouldn’t have had prior.” Calvin went on to describe that students who moved away from home to go to college had an even more meaningful experience similar to nondisabled peers who also went away to college, because “they gain the full experience of living in a dorm with their peers . . . and taking classes with peers with and without disabilities, but all with similar interests.”

**Standard 6: Coordination and Collaboration**

Standard 6 addressed how the various stakeholders would facilitate coordination with other departments and develop partnerships with outside agencies on behalf of the
students with ID. It included two quality indicators and nine benchmarks for the assessment of internal and external partners (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011). Evidence of this standard was reflected in the students’ lived experiences by using campus resources such as financial aid, academic advisors, career services, and collaboration with professors, and through encouragement of the students to be involved in their own educational planning (Weir et al., 2013).

According to the data collected by the researcher as related to Standard 6: Coordination and Collaboration, the lived experiences of the students with ID in PSE were meaningful, increased social relationships with peers and adults, and created a sense of connection to the community.

**Students had meaningful experiences.** Meaning was described in multiple ways by multiple participants and, in relationship to Standard 6 of the Think College framework, between multiple stakeholder groups. The lived experiences of the students with ID in PSE were described as meaningful 182 times in the data collected by the researcher. According to the 40 pieces of individual evidence collected by the researcher, meaningful experiences for students according to Standard 6 represented the students’ ability to interact confidently and successfully within the college environment, and the participants described the meaning of success in multiple ways.

One participant, Felicia, described the coordination between all stakeholders and the students as follows: “We’re trying to equip them with all of the tools they need so they know how to rent an apartment and get a job.” Felicia told the researcher that in order for the students to be successful once they completed the college program, they would need to leave with more skills than they had when they first started the program,
and in order to accomplish that, every experience that the students engaged in needed to be blaringly meaningful to the students so that they could see themselves applying those skills in a new setting.

The researcher interviewed a family member of a student with ID whose response showed appreciation of Felicia’s philosophy for student achievement. Elizabeth described her child’s college experience as meaningful because she knew her child was learning the skills necessary to survive when Elizabeth was no longer around. Elizabeth described how proud she was of her child for accomplishing things she never thought she would do. She said, “You’ve got to see what your child can become and be amazed at what they know.” Elizabeth told the researcher that she could not shelter her child for her entire life because

I mean, you’re not going to be there forever. You need to have some sort of security with her just being okay, [knowing] she can handle living on her own.

[Because of the college experience] I now know that she will have the ability to be on her own in an apartment. Yes, she’s still going to need some support to help her, but she can do the majority of it on her own.

Elizabeth told the researcher that ultimately, all of the meaning of her child’s college experience would be evident on graduation day: “Her meaningful moment is when she has that cap and gown on.”

Meaningful college experiences were described in a different way by Samantha, a program manager at TIL, as she described meaningful experiences for the students as follows: “You have to train yourself to look at their lives through their lens . . . instead of my lens, the program’s lens, or their parents’ lens.”
Students increased socialization and deepened relationships. Coordination of events and social activities that promoted student engagement within their peer circles and with campus resources proved to be successful, according to those interviewed by the researcher. Increased socialization was referenced 130 times in the data collected but was most prominent within peer groups. Gizmo stated that it felt good to be included in a regular UCLA class, and Scarlet Downey reported that her general education professors were very easy to talk to and accommodating to her needs. However, several students told stories about how they wished that they felt more included in college classes, for example, by being part of classroom discussions with other students. Although the students’ experiences represented access to socialization, they felt that their overall involvement in the classroom experience, for general education classes, could have been more rewarding. Craven Crowraven described that she would have felt more accepted in the classes if she was involved more with the other students, because “it would make me feel more interested.”

Students connected to the community. Coordination and collaboration was not only evident by the social relationships formed between the students, staff, and community members but also through the acceptance shown by the community toward the students with ID. According to the staff members at both Pathway and TIL, collaboration with other agencies, businesses, and stakeholders as a connection to the community was most rewarding when it came to being able to offer the students with ID an opportunity to shine as individuals. Connecting to the community was referenced 119 times in the data collected by the researcher, and the students’ responses reflected appreciation of how accepted they felt by the community.
In the interview with Felicia, the researcher noted that multiple participants had made mention of the strong connection of the community to the college program that supported students with ID. Felicia talked about how often the students from the TIL program would be invited to attend or participate in community events because the businesses in the community knew they could count on the TIL students. Felicia said, “It’s kind of known around town that if you need workers, they can count on us.”

**Standard 7: Sustainability**

Standard 7 addressed how the college planned to maintain the PSE program for students with ID through diverse funding sources to ensure fiscal health and future development through a varied advisory team. It included two quality indicators and eight benchmarks (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011). Evidence of students’ lived experiences in relationship to the standard included maintaining a relationship with the financial aid office and awareness of multiple funding sources that could continue to offer the opportunity for students with ID to have access to PSE, and an inclusive planning team that looked at innovative ways to maintain the programs for future students (Weir et al., 2013).

According to the data collected by the researcher as related to Standard 7: Sustainability, the lived experiences of the students with ID in PSE needed to ensure the continued creation of new opportunities for future students and created opportunities that were similar to those of other college students.

**Students gained new opportunities.** According to the program directors and staff who were interviewed by the researcher, sustainability of the programs themselves needed to include a plan for continued development of new opportunities for students to
become engaged in a college experience. Specific to this standard, the students with ID shared minimal stories with the researcher about why it would be important for the program to continue even after they had finished, but the students’ stories did not reflect specifics of what it meant to sustain a college program.

However, Luke, a professor at UCLA who had served students with ID in the past in a class he taught, discussed with the researcher how important it was for a college program to be empowered to continue to raise the bar of expectations for all students it would serve. He suggested that the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE would be influenced by new opportunities if the college system took a different approach. He stated,

I think just fundamentally, philosophically, top-down interventions are only effective to a point. At some point, it—there needs to be an organic kind of approach—here the people themselves who are being served are serving themselves and are shaping what those services look like. So it’s all about empowering people . . . I think that is the next level. Maybe that needs to be incorporated more into this program so that, again, you’re raising the bar. I mean, if you know how to engage students in a way, and they are holding up their end by being responsible partners and stakeholders, hence they understand the issues in a way that administrators, faculty, and staff don’t. I mean, that’s the best of all the worlds because you really have a good balance of experience and research and scholarship on one hand, and then on the other hand you have the lived experiences of those students who have to constantly inform and re-inform what the experts know.
Similarly, Samantha described how the administrators of the TIL program could use the collected experiences of the current students to impact new opportunities for future students. Samantha stated,

As we’re changing the TIL program, that’s something that we really seriously look at in their second year or sophomores, is how can we not just graduate them and pat them on the back and say, “Good luck.” We continue on with hooking them up with services and making sure that they have some type of social life along with an apartment and along with [getting] a job.

**Students had experiences that were similar to those of other college students.**

Another way that the sustainability of programs to include students with ID in PSE was exposed was through the similarities in experiences of both nondisabled and disabled students while accessing higher education. The reason why it was crucial to sustain a college program for students with ID that was similar to the college experience for their nondisabled peers was best described by a student herself. Dancer Girl told the researcher that all she ever wanted was “to be a college student . . . and to feel like everybody else even if you didn’t have a disability.” The researcher asked her why it was so important for her to be seen just as any other college student, and she replied, “[Because] I can achieve anything else that I set my mind to.”

**Standard 8: Ongoing Evaluation**

Standard 8 addressed the necessary part of ongoing development and reflection of practice through standard evaluation from multiple stakeholders. It included one quality indicator and six benchmarks to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and of ongoing evaluation (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011). Evidence of the experiences of students with ID
in PSE related to the importance of ongoing evaluation included collecting data from past students regarding their experiences and implementing program changes based on the feedback given by participants (Weir et al., 2013).

According to the data collected by the researcher as related to Standard 8: Ongoing Evaluation, the lived experiences of the students with ID in PSE needed to be meaningful and, overall, needed to reflect a benefit for others directly and indirectly affected by the students’ experiences.

**Students had meaningful experiences.** Meaningful experiences were reflected in data from the participants regarding how the individual college systems and practices embraced the mindset of serving students with ID in higher education, collaborative efforts to include the students with ID in their own learning, and why understanding meaningful experiences for students with ID in PSE would be a necessary part of ongoing evaluation. Meaningful experiences were noted in the data 182 times, and this was the second strongest theme acknowledged through the interviews, observations, and review of artifacts by the researcher.

According to a nondisabled peer, Michelle, meaning is a unique understanding exclusive to the individual who has experienced it. She told the researcher about how she had assisted a student with ID in learning to navigate his endeavors in college in a conversation she had with him about deadlines for multiple assignments and how his definition of what was meaningful in the moment was drastically different from hers. She shared,

His mindset is so different from mine. It makes me reevaluate my whole life because for me, I plan everything. I’m stressed all the time; I’m thinking about
things, and when I meet with this student, he’s just like, “Alright, let’s just do this assignment.” And I’m like, “You have a bunch of other assignments.” He goes, “Let’s just focus on this one for now.” It’s so different because it makes me compare the way that we think and makes me realize that I overcomplicate things. Michelle continued to tell the researcher how the students with ID had changed her perspective on life and that she learned to recognize each student as a unique individual. She stated, “They’re just the same as anybody else . . . and what does it mean ‘like everyone else’? . . . Everyone is so unique in their own way.”

Meaning was described not only by nondisabled peers but also by professors who were not familiar with working with students with ID. Samantha told the researcher a story about a professor who mistakenly thought a student in his class belonged to the “special program” at TIL. He contacted the TIL program for support with this unruly student whom he did not know how to support, let alone teach. After some careful discussion and attention to confidentiality of the student, the professor learned that the student he struggled with in class was not a student with a disability. He later described it as a meaningful experience where he learned not to stereotype or prejudge a student’s capability based on initial behavior in the classroom, and he became a huge advocate for students in the TIL program being recognized on campus for their ability, not their disability.

**Students had experiences that were beneficial for all/others.** Identifying the meaningfulness of the college experience for students with ID contributed to how the programs reflected on their success and ongoing evaluation. Meaningful experiences were not exclusive to the students with ID in PSE, and shared meaning and benefit were
acknowledged to some degree by all staff members interviewed from both college programs. Although the theme surrounding the benefit of others based on the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE was referenced with the most minimal frequency in the data, according to those who reported the stories, it did not mean that the benefit felt by others was not significant to them.

Samantha stated that the biggest benefit for her was “the willingness to educate yourself about the changes [in PSE options for students with ID] and what our students bring to the table.” Calvin shared a similar experience of benefit because he described that working with students with disabilities was not “even on my spectrum of my field of interest,” but after he began working in the TIL program, it opened his eyes to other opportunities for people and a way to give back. He spoke of how impacted his life had been by working with students with disabilities and being in a field of service where all good service is returned in life to those who give it.

Of all those who shared about how their lives had been changed because of the opportunity to work with students with ID in college, Luke’s analogy summed up the collective agreement best. He described the context in which students with ID participated in PSE:

This idea that—like our attitudes, even if they’re benign or indifferent, can kind of be like this—it’s like a fabric. When—in aggregate all of our attitudes combine and create a certain kind of environment, a culture, and probably obstacles to any kind of more forward thinking [regarding students with ID accessing PSE], more open thinking about how we can be more inclusive.
Summary

Based on the data collected by the researcher over the course of 3 months and through triangulation of the interviews, observations, and artifacts that were examined, the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE represented 13 themes uncovered by the voices and stories shared by the participants. The lived experiences of students with ID in PSE provided new opportunities to engage with same-age, nondisabled peers in an academic environment; were meaningful experiences that led to independence and community involvement; promoted determination in vocational development; afforded the students with ID increased access to socialization with nondisabled peers; showed similarities in typical college student interaction; represented a boost in self-confidence; and were acknowledged by those who were not disabled as beneficial for themselves.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Inclusive higher education has shown significant growth since the inception of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008. It was the intention of the researcher to uncover the lived experiences of students with intellectual disabilities (ID) participating in postsecondary education (PSE) settings in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education so that the professional educational community would have a greater understanding of their PSE experience and outcomes for their adult lives. The researcher used a qualitative approach, as recommended by Wolcott (2008), to best describe how the participants in the study made sense of their environment and how their experiences impacted their behavior. For means of this study, it was imperative that the students’ voices were heard (Creswell, 2012) so that reflection on their experiences would impact the future of higher education for students with ID.

The researcher spent over 3 months collecting data comprised of individual interviews, observations, and artifact reviews in order to uncover the collective experience of students with ID participating in PSE. A total of 24 participants were included in the study, and after significant time spent by the researcher in triangulating the data collected, 13 individual themes emerged related to the experiences of students with ID in PSE. Whereas Chapter IV presented the 13 themes of the data in relationship to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education, Chapter V presents the significant findings, conclusions, implications for action, recommendations for further research, and final reflections regarding the research.
Major Findings

After substantial review and triangulation of the data collected through interviews, observations, and artifacts, the researcher uncovered eight significant findings. The findings were substantiated by the data collected and were identified as eight categories associated with the themes that emerged. The findings are presented according to the associated themes, not by the Think College standards as the stories were shared in Chapter IV.

It was the intention of the researcher to share the voices and the stories of the students with ID in PSE first, with acknowledgement of how their stories could be viewed through the lens of the Think College framework, but not to include the Think College framework as an assessment tool to use the stories to evaluate the effectiveness of the standards at the PSE sites. The findings included eight categories related to the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE. The major findings are presented as they highlight the quality indicators of the eight Think College standards.

New Opportunities

The lived experiences of students with ID in PSE programs in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education (Standards 1, 2, 5, and 7) opened new opportunities for students to engage in academia alongside same-aged, nondisabled peers; access campus resources; and engage in adult learning.

Meaningful Experience

The lived experiences of students with ID in PSE programs in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for
Inclusive Higher Education (Standards 5, 6, and 8) were meaningful for students with ID to become accepted as part of the college community due to the collaborative support of those surrounding them.

**Independence and Teamwork**

The lived experiences of students with ID in PSE programs in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education (Standards 1, 3, and 4) created opportunities to learn independence skills as well as how to live, work, and socialize with others.

**Determination, Self-Advocacy, and Vocational Skills**

The lived experiences of students with ID in PSE programs in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education (Standards 2, 4, and 5) created a sense of determination to prove to themselves and to others that they could seek and maintain successful careers in the fields they desired.

**Community Acceptance and Inclusion**

The lived experiences of students with ID in PSE programs in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education (Standards 3, 5, and 6) increased socialization with nondisabled peers, deepened relationships with other adults, and created an inclusive community through engagement in a variety of college and community activities.

**Similar College Student Experience**

The lived experiences of students with ID in PSE programs in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for
Inclusive Higher Education (Standards 4, 5, and 7) were similar to those of other nondisabled college students in their exposure to a variety of academics, learning to be independent, and navigation of unfamiliar social environments.

**Confidence to Expect More of Themselves**

The lived experiences of students with ID in PSE programs in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education (Standards 1 and 2) built the students’ confidence through success and motivated them to increase their own expectations in life.

**Beneficial for Others**

The lived experiences of students with ID in PSE programs in Southern California that were aligned to the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education (Standard 8) showed significant benefit to others who engaged with the students with ID during their PSE career.

**Conclusions**

The researcher determined that eight conclusions were products of the findings based on deep reflection and triangulation of the interviews, observations, and artifacts collected as data, and the conclusions were supported by the literature review in Chapter II. The conclusions are presented according to the themes based on the significant findings.

**Conclusion 1: Students’ Experiences in PSE Enriched Their Development of Life Skills Beyond the Scope of the Classroom**

Due to the new opportunities that students with ID had exposure to in PSE, such as engagement in academia alongside same-aged, nondisabled peers, access to campus
resources, and engagement in adult learning, it can be concluded that the impact of their experiences enriched their development of life skills beyond the scope of the classroom. As supported by the literature in Chapter II, students with ID who had new opportunities in PSE became more competent adults because of their access to higher education and higher level thinking (HEOA, 2008). Additionally, according to the principles of universal design for learning (UDL), students with ID who had new opportunities in PSE that included multiple means of engagement with the curriculum presented to them became better engaged citizens due to the enriched learning environments they were exposed to (Connell et al., 1997; Grigal & Hart, 2010). Furthermore, the new opportunities students with ID had while in PSE, as found in the data collected by the researcher, generated momentum for the students with ID to continue success far into adulthood (Westling et al., 2013).

**Conclusion 2: Students’ Experiences in PSE Had a Positive Impact on the Collective Culture of the College**

Because of the meaningful experiences that students with ID had while participating in PSE, such as their acceptance into the college community, it can be concluded that their contribution to the college community had a positive impact on the collective culture of the college. Supporting evidence from Fekete, (2013) as well as the data collected by the researcher in the current study showed that students with ID were accepted as part of the college community, and they contributed to an increase in the positive culture and inclusive mindset on the college campus. Furthermore, when students with ID felt that they were accepted as part of the college community, they were more comfortable exploring other coursework that they were interested in to develop
emerging skills in areas of talent (Duff, 2013). Additionally, as Farnham (2011) noted, when students with ID were accepted as part of the college community, they felt more confident to speak up and become more involved in the courses they took.

**Conclusion 3: Students’ Experiences in PSE Contributed to the Community Rather Than Relyed on It**

Due to the heightened independent skills learned by the students with ID while participating in PSE, such as their ability to live, work, and socialize with others, it can be concluded that they contributed to their community rather than relied on it for support. Similar connections were found by Farnham (2011), where the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE created independent living opportunities that equipped them to care for themselves in adulthood and lessened the need for others to care for them. The lived experiences of students with ID in PSE taught them how to work with others in vocational environments and therefore maintain employment to be self-sufficient rather than requiring public assistance (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011). They also learned to socialize with a similar peer group, navigating conflict with others efficiently, which allowed them to build longer, deeper, and more meaningful relationships with others (Grigal et al., 2012).

**Conclusion 4: Students’ Experiences in PSE Extended Career Development Beyond the Internships and Into Adulthood**

As a result of the students’ determination in vocational skills and self-advocacy to maintain successful careers, it can be concluded that their career development extended beyond their internships and into their adult lives. According to the data collected by the researcher in the current study, and as evident in the findings by Hartz (2014), the
experiences of students with ID in PSE created a sense of determination, and they
continued to be successful in adulthood because they had experienced success in college.
The lived experiences of the students with ID in PSE created increased self-advocacy,
which led to their success in the jobs they had because they persevered through
vocational challenges. Self-determination and self-advocacy skills propelled the students
with ID in PSE to turn vocational internships into long-term, competitive employment
and contribute to the communities in which they worked as employees and taxpayers.
When the students felt comfortable to contribute to their learning environment, they
allowed themselves the opportunity to be seen as valuable in the educational environment
(Kessler Foundation & National Organization on Disability, 2010; Newman et al., 2009).

Conclusion 5: Students’ Experiences in PSE Increased Acceptance From
Nondisabled Peers on the Campus and in the Community

Due to the opportunities for socialization in the community that the students with
ID had while in PSE through the relationships they developed with other adults, it can be
concluded that acceptance of students with ID was a norm. Supporting evidence from
Weir et al. (2013) echoed that the experiences of students with ID in PSE increased
socialization, and they sought collaborative experiences within the community where
they could be involved and contribute to the collective culture. Evidence of community
inclusion was that students with ID in PSE became better communicators due to the
increased socialization and relationships with other adults (Grigal et al., 2012; Shaw &
Dukes, 2013). The students with ID in PSE became part of the college and surrounding
community they lived in, where they contributed to the culture and raised awareness and
acceptance of individuals with disabilities. Even after they completed their college
careers, they remained in the local community where they could contribute to the alumni association and promotion of the college for future students.

**Conclusion 6: Students in PSE Had Parallel Adult Development to That Experienced by Nondisabled College Students**

Because of the similarity in college experiences for students with ID and their nondisabled peers, such as their exposure to a variety of academics, increased independence, and participation in social environments, it can be concluded that students with ID had parallel adult development needs to those of their nondisabled peers in PSE. As supported by much of the evidence in the literature review, the researcher reached similar conclusions regarding the experiences of students with ID in PSE. The lived experiences of students with ID in PSE were similar to those of other college students because they explored general education academic courses they were interested in and required assistance from a larger support system, such as academic advising and peer mentorship, to guide them toward their goals. The support they received gave them a greater appreciation for the skills they learned as independent adults and made them more willing to venture out to seek other meaningful experiences in the college environment. The challenges they experienced drove them to seek access to additional meaningful experiences and authentic interactions with others (Fekete, 2013; Grigal & Hart, 2010; Grigal et al., 2013; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013).

**Conclusion 7: Students’ Experiences in PSE Led Them to More Meaningful and Fulfilling Adult Lives**

As a result of the confidence gained by students with ID in PSE, it can be concluded that students with ID were more independent and career driven. It can be
further concluded that students with ID aspired to have more meaningful and fulfilling adult lives. Not only did the researcher conclude that the experiences had by students with ID while in PSE challenged previous expectations regarding how students with ID could participate in PSE, but the conclusion was backed up by multiple sources as cited in Chapter II. Students with ID in PSE built their self-confidence by achieving their academic goals, and it motivated them to pursue further academic endeavors and become self-sufficient to live independently with minimal supports (Farnham, 2011; Hart, 2006; Hartz, 2014; Repetto et al., 2011). Ultimately, the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE motivated them to increase their own opportunities and set goals for themselves that included higher expectations for academic access and career aspirations (Grigal & Hart, 2010; HEOA, 2008).

**Conclusion 8: Students’ Experiences in PSE Led to Lifelong Relationships With Others**

Due to the beneficial interaction of abled and disabled peers learning alongside one another in PSE, it can be concluded that the relationships between abled and disabled peers were lifelong. Collaborative relationships with others were represented in the data collected by the researcher and were supported by the literature in Chapter II. Due to students with ID participating in PSE, the meaningfulness of the relationships was noted by those nondisabled peers who engaged with the students with ID because the nondisabled participants learned life lessons from the students with ID. The mentorships, professional relationships, and friendships forged between the students with ID and nondisabled peers were authentic in the role that each member represented for the other person. The seven student participants in the study shared various stories about
friendships that developed in PSE that they looked forward to continuing into adulthood. These interactions led to lifelong relationships and contributed to the collective good of the community because the students wished to continue the friendships even after the PSE experience had ended (Fekete, 2013; Grigal et al., 2012; Landmark et al., 2010; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013).

Implications for Action

Based on the findings and conclusions that described the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE, the researcher identified implications for action necessary to continue the inclusion of students with ID in higher education settings. The implications are listed according to the conclusions and are considered essential next steps to promote access to college experiences and to encourage other institutes of higher education to develop the supports necessary to recognize the contributions of a more diverse group of lifelong learners. Additionally, the researcher defines the next steps according to stakeholder groups that would be responsible for promoting and developing access to higher education for students with ID.

The stakeholder groups include but are not limited to the following: special education local planning areas (SELPAs), superintendents of K-12 districts, directors of curriculum and instruction, directors of special education, K-12 guidance counselors, K-12 general education teachers, K-12 special education teachers, parents of students with ID, students with ID, PSE administrators, PSE academic advisors, PSE faculty and professors, PSE offices of accessible education, and PSE support staff. The researcher recommends that the implications for action be viewed as transitional steps necessary for the development and promotion of access to higher education for students with ID. The
five implications for action are identified according to eight similar groupings of stakeholders with responsibilities to serve students with ID.

**Parents and Family Members of Students With ID**

Parents and family members of students with ID play a significant role in supporting the students with ID in their development of self-worth, independence, determination, and a desire to explore higher education. The process begins within the early elementary school years, when students learn to accept one another through inclusive opportunities, both in and out of school settings (Duff, 2013; Farnham, 2011; Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011). Table 4 represents necessary actions for family members to consider so that students with ID, from a very early age, grow up with the expectation of achievement in postsecondary settings.

Table 4

*Parent and Family Member Implications for Action*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Steps required by parent/family member of student with ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Create new, meaningful opportunities for students with ID in PSE       | • Encourage independence  
|                                                                       | • Advocate for the student with ID to participate with nondisabled peers                                               |
| Create independence, promote determination and self-advocacy, and     | • Create opportunities to problem solve with others  
| build teamwork skills for students with ID in PSE                     | • Foster critical thinking and collaboration  
|                                                                       | • Celebrate all levels of success                                                                                     |
| Create greater community acceptance and inclusion for students with   | • Participate in community events and activities  
| ID in PSE                                                             | • Raise awareness to reduce stigma of disability                                                                     |
| Create college experiences similar to those of nondisabled peers by   | • Increase expectations of academic exposure  
| increasing the expectations for students with ID in PSE               | • Collaborate with other stakeholders to develop an inclusion plan                                                    |
| Continue creating a multidimensional benefit for others who           | • Promote contribution focused on ability  
| participate in PSE                                                   | • Build relationships with other stakeholders                                                                        |

*Note.* The table represents the need for action by parents and family members of students with ID to create a climate of inclusive higher education involvement.
**Students With ID**

Students with ID are responsible for taking ownership of their learning while acknowledging the efforts of others who have supported their academic journey.

Students with ID need to take an active role in promoting themselves as contributors to a diverse society and increasing the skills they possess to be successful citizens (Flexer et al., 2005; Furgang, 2013; Gallinger, 2013). Table 5 represents necessary actions for students with ID to consider so that they understand the importance of setting high expectations for themselves in order to be successful in postsecondary settings.

Table 5

*Student With ID Implications for Action*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Steps required by students with ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Create new, meaningful opportunities for students with ID in PSE | • Explore a variety of academic coursework  
• Demonstrate willingness to contribute |
| Create independence, promote determination and self-advocacy, and build teamwork skills for students with ID in PSE | • Build connections with others for support  
• Be ready to learn from others  
• Be eager to problem solve |
| Create greater community acceptance and inclusion for students with ID in PSE | • Join community groups and activities  
• Share dreams and successes with others |
| Create college experiences similar to those of nondisabled peers by increasing the expectations for students with ID in PSE | • Become involved in the school community  
• Connect with resources on campus for additional opportunities |
| Continue creating a multidimensional benefit for others who participate in PSE | • Promote access to nondisabled peers in academic and nonacademic settings  
• Be open-minded to ideas of others |

*Note.* The table represents the need for action by students with ID to create a climate of inclusive higher education involvement.
K-8 Programs

Stakeholders who support K-8 educational settings have the opportunity to expose students with ID to inclusive classrooms from the beginning of the students’ school experience. The students’ thoughts regarding their educational expectations, all the way through college, are influenced heavily during their elementary school years. K-8 programs should remain focused on promoting success through educational access for all students of all abilities (Flexer et al., 2005; Getzel & Wehman, 2005; Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011). Table 6 represents necessary actions for K-8 programs to consider so that students with ID have exposure to rigorous classroom environments and the opportunity to learn alongside nondisabled peers.

Secondary Programs for Students With ID Ages 14-18

Secondary school offers the chance to discover academia in more specified subject areas through rich exploration of historical events and figures, literature, the arts, scientific research, and application of mathematics. Students with ID deserve to experience depth of knowledge in rigorous, academic classrooms to build their skills as effective communicators, collaborative teammates, and critical thinkers through creative expression of their learning. In order to encourage students with ID to seek higher education, their success must be built on a solid foundation of academic and nonacademic experiences alongside nondisabled peers (Bolt et al., 2011; Connell et al., 1997; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Grigal et al., 2013). Table 7 represents the necessary actions for secondary programs serving students with ID to consider so that they understand the importance of setting high expectations for success in higher education.
### Table 6

**K-8 Program Implications for Action**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Steps required by K-8 programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create new, meaningful opportunities for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Create inclusive classroom environments with rigorous instruction in the least restrictive environment (LRE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Minimize separate-setting instruction for targeted skills only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create independence, promote determination and self-advocacy, and build teamwork skills for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Build classrooms using universal design for learning (UDL) principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Promote critical thinking and collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Foster positive communication amongst peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create greater community acceptance and inclusion for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Encourage students with ID to join community events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support students with ID to speak out about their abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create college experiences similar to those of nondisabled peers by increasing the expectations for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Model active engagement in academic and nonacademic settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Inspire creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encourage risk taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Offer safe, unfamiliar social situations through authentic inclusion so that students learn to navigate social norms and become more involved in their educational community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue creating a multidimensional benefit for others who participate in PSE</td>
<td>• Increase opportunities for abled and disabled peers to engage in positive learning experiences together</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The table represents the need for action by K-8 programs to create a climate of inclusive higher education involvement.

**Teachers of Students Ages 14-18**

Secondary school teachers need to recognize their role in the development of all learners and encouraging students to challenge their own expectations. Secondary teachers need to be equipped to teach diverse learners and be courageous in their own instruction of students to serve as facilitators of students’ learning. In order to fulfill the
Table 7

*Secondary Program (Students With ID Ages 14-18) Implications for Action*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Steps required by secondary programs (students ages 14-18 with ID)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create new, meaningful opportunities for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Develop the individual transition plan (ITP; college, career, and independent living)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide access to a variety of academic coursework with nondisabled peers (LRE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Apply UDL principles in classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Create multidisciplinary teams that design coursework according to the needs of students in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create independence, promote determination and self-advocacy, and build teamwork skills for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Provide opportunities for engagement with nondisabled peers to promote collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Maximize natural supports in the environment for students to learn from one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create greater community acceptance and inclusion for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Encourage students with ID to be actively involved in their community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Build connections with agencies such as Best Buddies to promote inclusive mindset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create college experiences similar to those of nondisabled peers by increasing the expectations for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Establish expectation of involvement in rigorous academics with supports to be successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Foster collaborative relationships with parents for support and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue creating a multidimensional benefit for others who participate in PSE</td>
<td>• Promote inclusive clubs on campus to increase participation of students with ID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide training and professional development on understanding disabilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The table represents the need for action by secondary school programs serving students with ID, ages 14-18, to create a climate of inclusive higher education participation.

Implications for action described for secondary programs, teachers of secondary students (ages 14-18) need to take action with dynamic presentation of the material they teach.

Table 8 represents the necessary actions for secondary school teachers serving all learners to consider so that they understand the importance of setting high expectations for success in higher education.
Table 8

Teachers of Students Ages 14-18 Implications for Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Steps required by teachers of students ages 14-18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Create new, meaningful opportunities for students with ID in PSE | • Design lessons based on UDL principles  
• Include participation from all learners in the classroom (LRE)  
• Allow students to “show” their learning in different ways |
| Create independence, promote determination and self-advocacy, and build teamwork skills for students with ID in PSE | • Create diverse learner groups and encourage collaboration  
• Model positive communication  
• Promote risk taking  
• Celebrate individual successes |
| Create greater community acceptance and inclusion for students with ID in PSE | • Offer safe, unfamiliar social situations through authentic inclusion so that students learn to navigate social norms and become more involved in their educational community |
| Create college experiences similar to those of nondisabled peers by increasing the expectations for students with ID in PSE | • Challenge students to learn from one another  
• Encourage creative thinking  
• Create safe environments where all students share in the learning process |
| Continue creating a multidimensional benefit for others who participate in PSE | • Promote diversity clubs and activities where students with disabilities feel accepted |

Note. The table represents the need for action by teachers of students ages 14-18 to create a climate of inclusive higher education involvement.

Secondary Programs for Students With ID Ages 18-22

According to the most recent authorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEIA, 2004), students with disabilities, serviced under an individual education plan (IEP), are eligible to continue their education until the age of 22, unless they earn a high school diploma. Secondary school programs that service students with ID need to consider the needs of the learners and offer supports in the least restrictive environment (LRE), alongside same-aged, nondisabled peers. Many secondary school programs for students with ID are offered on the comprehensive campus where students...
14-18 years old are educated, and other programs provide services at a separate location where the students with ID can be educated alongside same-aged peers. Either setting in which the secondary school chooses to offer a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) needs to include opportunities for students with ID to be successful with their goals for postsecondary transition as described in the individual transition plan (ITP; Blumberg et al., 2008; Bolt et al., 2011). Table 9 represents what secondary programs for students with ID ages 18-22 need to offer so that the students have the skills necessary to seek access to higher education settings.

**Teachers of Students With ID Ages 18-22**

Teachers of students with ID ages 18-22, rather than on a traditional secondary school campus with 14- to 18-year-olds, in an alternative setting, transition-to-adulthood program, or dual enrollment, need to consider the needs of the individual students they serve and create individual learning plans to help them meet their goals. This particular stakeholder group is vital to the students with ID who would be eligible to seek enrollment in higher education, because students with ID ages 18-22 are at a critical turning point in their educational careers, which would result in either leaving secondary school to receive services from adult agencies or taking the opportunity to continue in postsecondary education (Grigal et al., 2005; Hafner et al., 2011; Hart, 2006; Landmark et al., 2010; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013). Table 10 represents what secondary teachers for students with ID ages 18-22 need to offer so that the students have the skills necessary to seek access to higher education settings and contribute more fully to the educational community.
Table 9

**Secondary Program (Students With ID Ages 18-22) Implications for Action**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Steps required by secondary programs (students ages 18-22 with ID)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create new, meaningful opportunities for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Continue development of the ITP based on students’ interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Offer alternative curriculum for functional life skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Design course descriptions based on a subset of the national standards or state-adopted standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Promote access to the academic LRE with support from special education staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create independence, promote determination and self-advocacy, and build teamwork skills for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Create support groups, layers of intervention, access to vocational/life coaches in the community where the students can go for assistance if they encounter challenges. This is important for sustainability of skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Include community-based instruction (CBI) as a means of generalizing skills learned in the classroom to the real world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create greater community acceptance and inclusion for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Form collaborative community teams to develop more inclusive vocational environments where students with disabilities can showcase their expertise and talent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Promote awareness about ability beyond disability for the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create college experiences similar to those of nondisabled peers by increasing the expectations for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Partner with local community college or university to develop inclusion plan for students with ID to access PSE (dual-enrollment options)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Offer professional development to community colleges and universities on serving students with ID in higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue creating a multidimensional benefit for others who participate in PSE</td>
<td>• Build relationships with multiple stakeholders to understand the meaning of acceptance and inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide training for community members to learn effective communication skills with diverse learners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The table represents the need for action by secondary school programs for students with ID, ages 18-22, to create a climate of inclusive higher education involvement.
### Table 10

*Teachers of Students With ID Ages 18-22 Implications for Action*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Steps required by teachers of students with ID (ages 18-22)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create new, meaningful opportunities for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Prepare targeted activities to meet the goals of the ITP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Explore variations of functional-life-skills curriculum such as functional reading and writing, money management, personal and interpersonal relations, social skills, problem solving, independent living, communication, vocational exploration, and recreational skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Offer opportunities to engage in academic coursework with nondisabled peers (when available)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create independence, promote determination and self-advocacy, and build teamwork skills for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Create practice vocational environments to sharpen skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Promote problem solving amongst peers when conflict arises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encourage collaboration and communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Include CBI on a regular, weekly basis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create greater community acceptance and inclusion for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Create partnerships with local community organizations so that students can share their success and market themselves in the competitive job market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teach the importance of good citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create college experiences similar to those of nondisabled peers by increasing the expectations for students with ID in PSE</td>
<td>• Design lessons used to teach study strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teach students with ID to access supports and resources in the natural environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Explore multiple PSE settings and understand the enrollment requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue creating a multidimensional benefit for others who participate in PSE</td>
<td>• Promote diversity through celebration of differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Offer training and collaborative learning opportunities for nondisabled students to learn about students with disabilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The table represents the need for action by teachers of students with ID ages 18-22 to create a climate of inclusive higher education involvement.
PSE Settings and Programs

Finally, PSE settings and the administrative teams that develop the programs to support diverse learners in higher education are ultimately responsible for creating and maintaining dynamic learning environments where students of all abilities will achieve success (Grigal & Hart, 2010; Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011; Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2011; Mock & Love, 2012). According to the HEOA (2008), the goal is for all learner types to have access to higher education in order to acquire the skills necessary to contribute to the educational community, find success in a competitive job market, and participate in the world as responsible citizens. Table 11 represents the necessary actions for administrators in PSE settings to consider when creating and sustaining programs that serve students with ID.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings, conclusions, and consideration of implications for action in order to promote inclusive higher education, the researcher suggests the following topics for consideration of further research to add to the body of knowledge surrounding students with ID participating in PSE:

1. Examine preparation programs in secondary schools that encourage students with ID to continue to higher education.

2. Examine the success of students with ID after PSE—students’ reflections on their lived experience after the experience was over. Did they maintain the skills they learned? Was the experience worthwhile? How did the experience enrich adult life after college?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Steps required by PSE settings and programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Create new, meaningful opportunities for students with ID in PSE | • Develop interdisciplinary groups to create options for coursework in which students with ID would feel comfortable to participate  
• Create updated curriculum in alignment with Think College framework and develop standards that define meaningful experiences  
• Offer professional development on inclusive learning environments and inclusive college culture by supporting and educating students of various abilities and disabilities  
• Create innovative classroom environments so that students have increased access to nondisabled peers  
• Create continued or extension opportunities for students who wish to continue with their education after finishing the initial program/certification requirements |
| Create independence, promote determination and self-advocacy, and build teamwork skills for students with ID in PSE | • Develop more relationships with businesses to create opportunities for internships  
• Create strong relationships with community members (city council, public service, etc.) to increase disability awareness, and open opportunities for students to be seen as successful in vocational environments  
• Provide inclusive opportunities for members of the community to learn effective communication skills |
| Create greater community acceptance and inclusion for students with ID in PSE | • Seek support from local agencies to promote awareness of and inclusive opportunities for individuals with disabilities that highlight their ability and contribution to the community  
• Provide inclusive opportunities for members of the community to learn effective communication skills  
• Create partnerships with local businesses for increased opportunities for vocational internships |
| Create college experiences similar to those of nondisabled peers by increasing the expectations for students with ID in PSE | • Create interdisciplinary teams that will review current course offerings and determine how students with ID could be included more significantly in their areas of interest and skills  
• Develop detailed assessment tools that will help to determine individual student skills that would support their involvement in general education coursework and use the results to redefine inclusive settings |
Table 11 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Steps required by PSE settings and programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create college experiences similar to those of nondisabled peers by increasing the expectations for students with ID in PSE (cont’d)</td>
<td>• Increase fundraising options for scholarship funds to supplement tuition costs so that students can access PSE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Continue creating a multidimensional benefit for others who participate in PSE | • Develop more access to inclusive coursework in higher education where students are aware of the contributions of all students in the classroom  
• Develop more inclusive independent living opportunities for abled and nondisabled peers to cohabitate—encourage strengths and strengthen weaknesses of one another |

*Note.* The table represents the need for action by PSE settings and programs to create a climate of inclusive higher education involvement.

3. Continue to share the students’ voice by further exploration of the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE aligned to the Think College framework in the United States.

4. Consider PSE programs that support students with ID in other countries. Are there similarities in the lived experiences of the students in different countries?

5. Explore the effects on nondisabled peers who supported students with ID in PSE as mentors.

6. Investigate the perceptions of faculty in PSE regarding the inclusion of students with ID.

7. Examine the experiences of students with ID in PSE who have continued in higher education for additional certificates or degrees.

8. Investigate the outcomes of vocational experiences/success of students with ID after participation in PSE.
Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Promoting education equity and breaking down the barriers for access to higher education for students with ID began over 40 years ago with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. Although the researcher was not yet born at the inception of this act, her passion for serving the underserved was evident early in her childhood by her commitment to caring for those around her in need. Still committed to leave her heart for the world, she left home and enrolled in higher education. After a skiing accident left her dreams of being a pilot in the U.S. Air Force to swirl amongst the clouds, she was drawn back to her original calling as a child, to serve as a teacher. Little did she know that the adrenaline rush she desired was waiting for her as she began working with students with special needs. It took no more than a few days before she was learning to see the world through the eyes of a child, a disabled child, who had been discarded by society and labeled for everything he was unable to do, but the researcher seized the chance to turn obstacles into opportunities and dedicated her career to show the world everything that students with special needs could do.

The researcher saw the students for their ability first, and although her desire to become a pilot was altered by a life-changing event, the researcher decided to make it her life’s legacy to teach students with special needs how to uncover their hidden abilities and turn what others define as obstacles into meaningful opportunities. Seeing students for their ability first and supporting their development as contributing members in a diverse society became her life’s work. In order to continue leaving a legacy worth following, the researcher knew she needed to conduct scholarly research to investigate and understand the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE so that additional
opportunities would be offered for all students to pursue their dreams to access higher education, regardless of any label they have had in the past.

The process of completing the research project was life-changing, transformational, and nothing short of inspirational. The time that was spent preparing for the scholarly work and then performing the research by collecting the data shared through the voices of the students left the researcher excited to do more. The stories shared by the students with ID in PSE, and those who encompassed their support system, were rich with life, insight, and profound meaning. The researcher was humbled by the opportunity to share the lived experiences of the students with ID in PSE in hopes that others who read this would be changed for the good and willing to see students for their ability beyond disability and their contribution to a diverse, global society.
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### APPENDIX A

#### Synthesis Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Special education law</th>
<th>PSE programs for students with ID</th>
<th>Transition preparation</th>
<th>Think College &amp; TPSID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADA Amendments Act of 2008</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baer, Daviso, Flexer, Queen, and Meindl (2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blumberg, Carroll, and Petroff (2008)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolt, Decker, Lloyd, and Morlock (2011)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil Rights Act of 1964</td>
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<td>Connell et al. (1997)</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Farnham (2011)</td>
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<td>Fekete (2013)</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Flexer, Baer, Luft, and Simmons (2005)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Fuchs and Fuchs (1994)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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APPENDIX B

Student Interview Protocol and Questions

Date:___________________________________

PSE Program: Pathway/TIL/TRACE (circle one)

Pseudonym:_____________________________

Introduction
• Welcome and Thank You for participating
• Discuss purpose of the interview
• Reminder of Informed Consent & Bill of Rights
• Present interview structure (audio recorded, taking notes, and pseudonym)
• Questions before beginning
• Test audio equipment
• Make sure participant feels comfortable, offer water or snacks throughout, check environment for lighting and distractions, reminders about taking breaks or discontinuing at any time

Demographic Information
1. What is your age?
2. Before entering ________________(PSE) where did you go to high school?
3. How many semesters have you been attending ________________(PSE)? When did you first begin at ____________(PSE)?
4. Did you attend any other PSE before_________________(current PSE)?

Academic Access
1. Can you tell me about some of the classes that you take here at ________________(PSE)? What class have you enjoyed the most and why? Have you experienced difficulties in any class? If so, can you tell me how you overcame them?
2. Can you tell me about what you do in your classes? How do you study?

Career Development
1. Can you tell me how college has prepared you for work?
2. Tell me about the job skills you have learned from being in this college program. Can you give me an example of a job skill you are good at? What about the ones you need to work on?

Campus Membership
1. Tell me about what you do on campus when you are not in class or at work. Who do you hang out with?
2. Can you tell me about the friendships you have developed in college? How often do you talk or hang out?

Self-Determination
1. Can you tell me about where you live? Who do you live with?
2. Can you tell me a story about a time in college where you had to make a big decision? Was there others who helped you? If so, how did they help?
3. How do you get around in your community?

College Systems/Practices
1. Can you tell me about your plan for life after you finish college? What do you hope to learn so you can be successful in adulthood?
2. How does it feel to be a student in college?

Coordination and Collaboration
1. Tell me about how you learn about activities on campus.
2. How do you feel that your professors or other adults on campus help you?

Sustainability
1. Do you feel the _____PSE program should continue? If yes, can you tell me why you feel that it is important for the _____PSE program to continue for other students?

Ongoing Evaluation
1. What was your experience like with the tests you took when you first started in college?
2. How do you feel the tests helped you throughout the school year? If they did not help, then why?

At the conclusion of the interview, ask the participant if he/she has any questions for the researcher or anything else he/she would like to add.

Thank the participant for his/her time and reassure the confidentiality of all responses.
APPENDIX C

Administrator/Faculty Interview Protocol and Questions

Date:___________________________________

PSE Program: Pathway/TIL/TRACE (circle one)

Pseudonym:_____________________________

Introduction

- Welcome and Thank You for participating
- Discuss purpose of the interview
- Reminder of Informed Consent & Bill of Rights
- Present interview structure (audio recorded, taking notes, and pseudonym)
- Questions before beginning
- Test audio equipment
- Make sure participant feels comfortable, offer water or snacks throughout, check environment for lighting and distractions, reminders about taking breaks or discontinuing at any time

Background Information

1. How long have you been supporting _____________(PSE)? (Admin/Faculty)
2. What is your current level of involvement with the program and the students?
3. Tell me about your initial feelings when you heard about the idea of supporting students with ID at your college? What were the reactions of your colleagues?

Academic Access

1. How do you feel the classes offered here at _____________(PSE) are in support of developing students with ID to be successful?
2. What are some of the barriers that exist and how are they handled?
3. Tell me about what has impacted how you teach the most? (accommodations, training, additional content, pacing of content, planning teams, etc.)

Career Development

1. Tell me about the experiences the students have to gain job skills.
2. What has surprised you most about the career experiences of these students in your program?

Campus Membership

1. Can you describe the social opportunities that exist to get students with ID involved in the college?
2. What events/activities do they engage in the most? Why?

Self-Determination

1. Tell me about how you feel the students’ living accommodations impacts their experience in college.
2. How do you work with the students to promote their independence?
3. How do you see the students’ experiences impacting their community when they leave?
College Systems/Practices
1. Tell me about how the supports for students in the areas of academics, campus, or job development have contributed to the student’s lived experience in the program.
2. Can you describe how a student would know what classes to take? Who guides them in the process?

Coordination and Collaboration
1. How has the involvement of the administration impacted the lived experience of the student with ID in the _____________(PSE) program?
2. If your role as the administrator/faculty were to be eliminated, how would the experience for the student with ID be changed?

Sustainability
1. Tell me about how the students’ experiences would be different if the _____________(PSE) program did not exist? What safeguards are in place for the program to continue?

Ongoing Evaluation
1. How do you determine how effective the PSE program is for students with ID?
2. What do you do when the students are not successful?

At the conclusion of the interview, ask the participant if he/she has any questions for the researcher or anything else he/she would like to add.

Thank the participant for his/her time and reassure the confidentiality of all responses.
APPENDIX D

Family Interview Protocol and Questions

Date:___________________________________

PSE Program: Pathway/TIL/TRACE (circle one)

Pseudonym:_____________________________

Introduction
- Welcome and Thank You for participating
- Discuss purpose of the interview
- Reminder of Informed Consent & Bill of Rights
- Present interview structure (audio recorded, taking notes, and pseudonym)
- Questions before beginning
- Test audio equipment
- Make sure participant feels comfortable, offer water or snacks throughout, check environment for lighting and distractions, reminders about taking breaks or discontinuing at any time

Background Information
1. What is your relationship to the student?
2. How long has your student be at the _____________(PSE) program?
3. Did your student attend any other PSE program before this one? If so, what program?

Academic Access
1. How do you feel the classes your student took at ____________(PSE) influenced his/her experience in college?
2. Can you think of a specific class or experience that your student had in college that changed him/her for the good?

Career Development
1. How do you see your student as prepared for employment after participating in the ______________(PSE) program?
2. Can you tell me a story of when you saw a noticeable change in your students work ability due to being enrolled in the ____________(PSE) program?

Campus Membership
1. How do you see your student participating on the college campus with the other students?
2. Tell me about how those activities have enriched the life of your student.

Self-Determination
1. Where do you see your student in five years after completing the __________(PSE) program? Employment? Independence? Social?
2. How would the student you described in five years be different if he/she had not participated in the ______________(PSE) program?

College Systems/Practices
1. Tell me about how it feels to have a student with ID in college.
2. How do you feel about the way that the __________(PSE) program includes your student in the culture of the campus?

Coordination and Collaboration
1. Tell me about how you communicate with others at the school, if at all.
2. Can you describe to me when you knew you were comfortable with sending your student to ______________(PSE)?

Sustainability
1. Why do you feel it’s important for the __________PSE program to continue even after your student has complete the program?

Ongoing Evaluation
1. How do you know that your student is successful in the _________PSE program?
2. Can you describe what you feel has been the most meaningful moment for your student this far in the program?

At the conclusion of the interview, ask the participant if he/she has any questions for the researcher or anything else he/she would like to add.

Thank the participant for his/her time and reassure the confidentiality of all responses.
APPENDIX E

Focus Group Interview Protocol and Questions

Date:___________________________________

PSE Program: Pathway/TIL/TRACE (circle one)

Pseudonym:___________________________

Introduction

- Welcome and Thank You for participating
- Discuss purpose of the interview
- Reminder of Informed Consent & Bill of Rights
- Present interview structure (audio recorded, taking notes, and pseudonym)
- Questions before beginning
- Test audio equipment
- Make sure participant feels comfortable, offer water or snacks throughout, check environment for lighting and distractions, reminders about taking breaks or discontinuing at any time

Background Information

1. Identify roles of those who attended: _____Non-disabled peer; ____Faculty; ____Other provider
2. How long have you been supporting the ____________ (PSE) program? Less than 1 year, 2-3 years, 4-5 years, 6 years or more.

Academic Access

1. Can you tell me about some of the classes that you take (or participate in) here with students with ID?
2. What types of interactions do you have in class? What benefits and barriers would you describe in the inclusive classroom?

Career Development

1. Tell me about how you feel the college experience has prepared students with ID to be employed.
2. Can you describe an experience where you saw a student with ID learn and apply a job skill?

Campus Membership

1. How do you perceive the inclusion of students with ID on the college campus? What do you feel students with ID contribute to the college campus?
2. Can you describe a friendship/social relationship that you have developed with a student with ID? How has the friendship/social relationship changed you?

Self-Determination

1. Can you tell me about your living arrangements on the campus and what types of students are in your dorm?
2. How do you think that the college dorm-like living experience has impacted the students with ID at _____________ (PSE)?
College Systems/Practices
   1. What do you hope to learn in college so you can be successful in adulthood?
   2. Tell me about what similarities or differences you feel that students with ID would have compared to the answer you just gave.

Coordination and Collaboration
   1. How do you feel the faculty on the campus support you as a student? What about students with ID?

Sustainability
   2. Do you feel the _____PSE program should continue? If yes, can you tell me why you feel that it is important for the _____PSE program to continue for other students?

Ongoing Evaluation
   1. What would you perceive as meaningful experiences for students with ID in college?
   2. If there was something you could change about how the students experience the program, what would it be and why?

At the conclusion of the interview, ask the participant if he/she has any questions for the researcher or anything else he/she would like to add.

Thank the participant for his/her time and reassure the confidentiality of all responses.
# APPENDIX F

## Observation Log

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### Setting Observation:
- □ Academic
- □ Non-Academic (recreation, leisure, study)
- □ Employment/Vocational

### Narrative Evidence:
APPENDIX G

Informed Consent

Informed Consent—Interview

**Information About:** Students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) accessing Post-Secondary Education (PSE) settings.

**Responsible Investigator:** Kathleen Mercier

**Purpose of Study:** You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Kathleen Mercier, a doctoral student from Brandman University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) in Post-Secondary Education (PSE) settings in southern California in order to gain insight to the student’s perception of meaningful experiences that impacted them in terms of college preparedness, employment success, and independence in the adult world. The study used the Think College Standards Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education as a guide to investigate the students’ experiences in college settings that embraced the Think College standards for Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTP).

**Why is this research being done?** This study aims to capture the essence of a student with ID experiences’ in a PSE setting as it relates to the outcomes in their adult lives.

**Who are potential participants?** Potential participants include students with ID in PSE ages 18-28 years who are non-conserved, family members of students with ID in PSE, administrators and faculty members who support students with ID in PSE, and non-disabled peers who are aware of students with ID participating on the same PSE setting.

Students with ID who participate will be required to confirm eligibility as a student with ID by verification of eligibility from the PSE program director/administrator.

**What is expected of the participants?** For those who qualify as potential participants, they will decide to take part in the research study by signing the informed consent document.

Students with ID will complete an individual interview with Kathleen Mercier, researcher, and be observed in a minimum of one academic setting/classroom and one non-academic setting (social or vocational). Students with ID will sign an additional informed consent document specific to the observation. Students with ID are allowed to bring a supportive representative, selected by the student, to the interview who would act in the best interest of the student.*
Administrators, Faculty, and family members will complete an interview with Kathleen Mercier, researcher. **Family members will complete ascent box upon signature acknowledging participation for the student with ID.

Non-disabled peers and other faculty/staff members of the PSE who chose to participate will complete a group interview at a designated location.

All interviews will audio recorded. A transcript of the interview will be sent to the participant for review and correction. The interview can be paused or discontinued at any time by the participant. Artifacts gathered by the researcher will be kept strictly confidential and in a locked location only accessible to the researcher.

How much time is required from the participant? Then individual interviews will take approximately one hour. The interviews will be audio recorded and a transcript of the interview will be sent to the participant for review and anything that the participant feels is in error or should be omitted, will be done so by the researcher. The audio recordings will be kept in a secured electronic file, accessible to only the researcher for review of the conversation for validity of the responses. The electronic files and transcription will be destroyed no longer than five years after the research is completed. The observations will take approximately one to two hours depending on the activity/setting being observed.

Where will the interviews and observations take place? The interviews will take place at an agreeable, private location that is comfortable for the participant. The observations will take place at the location of choice by the student with ID in either an academic or non-academic setting.

What benefit can the participants consider? Participants will not be compensated for his/her contribution, but will agree to participate on a voluntary basis. Participants may feel rewarded knowing that contribution to the field of inclusive higher education has been made.

How will the participants’ confidentiality be protected? The researcher will keep all recorded interviews, observation documentation, and artifacts in a locked location only accessible to the researcher. Pseudo names will be used for all participants with the exception of the signed consent form which will be kept secure by the researcher and then destroyed at no longer than five years after the research study is completed.

What risks can the participant expect? There is minimal to no risk of physical, psychological, social, or financial risk to participate in this research.

By participating in this study, I agree to complete an interview with researcher, Kathleen Mercier. The interview will take approximately one hour and will be scheduled at a location comfortable and agreeable to me. Completion of the interview will occur between September and November, 2016.
I understand that:

a) There are minimal risks associated with the research. I understand that the researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping my identifying documents in a locked drawer accessible only to the researcher.

b) The potential benefit of this study will include my contribution of experience to the world of inclusive higher education. The findings of the study will be available to me at the conclusion of the study. I will not be compensated for my participation. I willingly participate on a voluntary basis. At any time I wish to discontinue my participation in the research, I can do so; however, I will need to contact Kathleen Mercier to alert her of my discontinued participation.

c) If I have any questions or concerns, I can contact Kathleen Mercier, researcher, at kathleen.mercier14@gmail.com or by cell phone at 661-435-2083. I can also contact the Office of the Assistant Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it, and I hereby consent to the procedures set forth.

___________________________________________________________________________

Printed Name of Participant & Role                                      Signature of Participant

___________________________________________________________________________

Signature of Researcher & Date

** Although my student __________________(name), is a non-conserved adult and maintains his/her own educational rights, I ________________(parent name) understand and agree to the terms of the research study, with recognition of protection to my student's confidentiality, allow my student __________________(name) to participate in this research study. My student ________________(name) must also sign in agreement to be part of this study. My acknowledgement alone does not constitute my student’s participation in the study. ____ (parent initial)

*I intend to bring a support representative with me to the interview. ______(student with ID initial)
Informed Consent—Student With ID Observation

**Information About:** Students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) accessing Post-Secondary Education (PSE) settings.

**Responsible Investigator:** Kathleen Mercier

**Purpose of Study:** You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Kathleen Mercier, a doctoral student from Brandman University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) in Post-Secondary Education (PSE) settings in southern California in order to gain insight to the student’s perception of meaningful experiences that impacted them in terms of college preparedness, employment success, and independence in the adult world. The study used the Think College Standards Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education as a guide to investigate the students’ experiences in college settings that embraced the Think College standards for Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTP).

**Why is this research being done?** This study aims to capture the essence of a student with ID experiences’ in a PSE setting as it relates to the outcomes in their adult lives.

**Who are potential participants?** Potential participants include students with ID in PSE ages 18-28 years who are non-conserved.

**What is expected of the participants?** For those who qualify as potential participants, they will decide to take part in the research study by signing the informed consent document.

Students with ID will agree to being observed in one academic setting/classroom and one non-academic setting (social or vocational).

The observation can be paused or discontinued at any time by the participant. Observational notes gathered by the researcher will be kept strictly confidential.

**How much time is required from the participant?** The observations will take approximately one to two hours depending on the activity/setting being observed.

**Where will the interviews and observations take place?** The observations will take place at the location of choice by the student with ID in either an academic or non-academic setting.

**What benefit can the participants consider?** Participants will not be compensated for his/her contribution, but will agree to participate on a voluntary basis. Participants may feel rewarded knowing that contribution to the field of inclusive higher education has been made.
How will the participants’ confidentiality be protected? The researcher will keep all recorded interviews, observation documentation, and artifacts in a locked location only accessible to the researcher. Pseudo names will be used for all participants with the exception of the signed consent form which will be by the researcher and then destroyed at no longer than five years after the research study is completed.

What risks can the participant expect? There is minimal to no risk of physical, psychological, social, or financial risk to participate in this research.

By participating in this study, I agree to be observed by the researcher, Kathleen Mercier. The observation will take approximately one to two hours and will be scheduled at a location comfortable and agreeable to me. Completion of the observation will occur between September and November, 2016.

I understand that:

d) There are minimal risks associated with the research. I understand that the researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping my identifying documents in a locked drawer accessible only to the researcher.

e) The potential benefit of this study will include my contribution of experience to the world of inclusive higher education. The findings of the study will be available to me at the conclusion of the study. I will not be compensated for my participation. I willingly participate on a voluntary basis. At any time I wish to discontinue my participation in the research, I can do so; however, I will need to contact Kathleen Mercier to alert her of my discontinued participation.

f) If I have any questions or concerns, I can contact Kathleen Mercier, researcher, at kathleen.mercier14@gmail.com or by cell phone at 661-435-2083. I can also contact the Office of the Assistant Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it, and I hereby consent to the procedures set forth.

___________________________________  ___________________________________
Printed Name of Participant & Role                            Signature of Participant

___________________________________
Signature of Researcher & Date
TAFT College Informed Consent—Interview

**Information About:** Students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) accessing Postsecondary Education (PSE) settings.

**Responsible Investigator:** Kathleen Mercier

**Purpose of Study:** You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Kathleen Mercier, a doctoral student from Brandman University. The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) in Postsecondary Education (PSE) settings in southern California in order to gain insight to the student’s perception of meaningful experiences that impacted them in terms of college preparedness, employment success, and independence in the adult world. The study used the Think College Standards Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education as a guide to investigate the students’ experiences in college settings that embraced the Think College standards for Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTP).

**Why is this research being done?** This study aims to capture the essence of a student with ID experiences’ in a PSE setting as it relates to the outcomes in their adult lives.

**Who are potential participants?** Potential participants include students with ID in PSE ages 18-28 years who are non-conserved, family members of students with ID in PSE, administrators and faculty members who support students with ID in PSE, and nondisabled peers who are aware of students with ID participating on the same PSE setting.

Students with ID who participate will be required to confirm eligibility as a student with ID by verification of eligibility from the PSE program director/administrator.

**What is expected of the participants?** For those who qualify as potential participants, they will decide to take part in the research study by signing the informed consent document.

Students with ID will complete an individual interview with Kathleen Mercier, researcher, and be observed in a minimum of one academic setting/classroom and one non-academic setting (social or vocational). Students with ID will sign an additional informed consent document specific to the observation. Students with ID are allowed to bring a supportive representative, selected by the student, to the interview who would act in the best interest of the student.*

Administrators. Faculty, and family members will complete an interview with Kathleen Mercier, researcher.

Nondisabled peers and other faculty/staff members of the PSE who chose to participate will complete a group interview at a designated location.
All interviews will audio recorded. A transcript of the interview will be sent to the participant for review and correction. The interview can be paused or discontinued at any time by the participant. Artifacts gathered by the researcher will be kept strictly confidential and in a locked location only accessible to the researcher.

**How much time is required from the participant?** Then individual interviews will take approximately one hour. The interviews will be audio recorded and a transcript of the interview will be sent to the participant for review and anything that the participant feels is in error or should be omitted, will be done so by the researcher. The audio recordings will be kept in a secured electronic file, accessible to only the researcher for review of the conversation for validity of the responses. The electronic files and transcription will be destroyed no longer than five years after the research is completed. The observations will take approximately one to two hours depending on the activity/setting being observed.

**Where will the interviews and observations take place?** The interviews will take place at an agreeable, private location that is comfortable for the participant. The observations will take place at the location of choice by the student with ID in either an academic or non-academic setting.

**What benefit can the participants consider?** Participants will not be compensated for his/her contribution, but will agree to participate on a voluntary basis. Participants may feel rewarded knowing that contribution to the field of inclusive higher education has been made.

**How will the participants’ confidentiality be protected?** The researcher will keep all recorded interviews, observation documentation, and artifacts in a locked location only accessible to the researcher. Pseudo names will be used for all participants with the exception of the signed consent form which will be kept secure by the researcher and then destroyed at no longer than five years after the research study is completed.

**What risks can the participant expect?** There is minimal to no risk of physical, psychological, social, or financial risk to participate in this research.

By participating in this study, I agree to complete an interview with researcher, Kathleen Mercier. The interview will take approximately one hour and will be scheduled at a location comfortable and agreeable to me. Completion of the interview will occur between September and November, 2016.

I understand that:

a) There are minimal risks associated with the research. I understand that the researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping my identifying documents in a locked drawer accessible only to the researcher.

b) The potential benefit of this study will include my contribution of experience to the world of inclusive higher education. The findings of the study will be
available to me at the conclusion of the study. I will not be compensated for my participation. I willingly participate on a voluntary basis. At any time I wish to discontinue my participation in the research, I can do so; however, I will need to contact Kathleen Mercier to alert her of my discontinued participation.

c) If I have any questions or concerns, I can contact Kathleen Mercier, researcher, at kathleen.mercier14@gmail.com or by cell phone at 661-435-2083, or Dr. Lee, dissertation chair, at (714) 726-1537. I can also contact the Office of the Assistant Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it, and I hereby consent to the procedures set forth.

___________________________________  ___________________________________
Printed Name of Participant & Role  Signature of Participant

___________________________________
Signature of Researcher & Date

*I intend to bring a support representative with me to the interview. ______(student with ID initial)
APPENDIX H

BUIRB Approval Letter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Investigator/Researcher:</th>
<th>Kathleen Mercier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty or Student ID Number:</td>
<td>B00457644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of Research Project:</td>
<td>Students with Intellectual Disabilities Accessing Post-Secondary Education Settings Promoting Education Equity: Seeing students for their ability first and supporting their development as contributing members into a diverse society</td>
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<td>Project Type:</td>
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<td>☑ Doctoral Dissertation EdD</td>
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<td>Funded:</td>
<td>☑ No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Duration:</td>
<td>9/1/16 to 9/1/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator’s Address:</td>
<td>40911 Knoll Drive Palmdale, CA 93551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Address:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kathleen.mercier14@gmail.com">kathleen.mercier14@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Advisor/Sponsor/Chair Name:</td>
<td>Dr. Jeff Leo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Address:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:joo1@brandman.edu">joo1@brandman.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category of Review:</td>
<td>☑ Standard Review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brandman University IRB Rev. 11.14.14 Adopted November 2014
☑ I have completed the NIH Certification and included a copy with this proposal
☐ NIH Certificate currently on file in the office of the IRB Chair or Department Office

Signature of Principal Investigator: Kathleen Mercier  Date: 8/24/16

Signature of Faculty Advisor/Sponsor/Dissertation Chair: Lee, Jeffrey  Date: 8/24/16

Digitally signed by Kathleen
Date: 2016.08.24 23:26:03 -07'00'

Digitally signed by Lee, Jeffrey
DN: cn=Lee, jeffrey C=US
Date: 2016.08.24 23:26:03 -07'00'
BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
IRB APPLICATION ACTION—APPROVAL
COMPLETED BY BUIRB

IRB ACTION/APPROVAL

Name of Investigator/Researcher: Kathleen Mercier

☐ Returned without review. Insufficient detail to adequately assess risks, protections and benefits.
☐ Approved/Certified as Exempt form IRB Review.
☐ Approved as submitted.
☐ Approved, contingent on minor revisions (see attached)
☐ Requires significant modifications of the protocol before approval. Research must resubmit with modifications (see attached)
☐ Researcher must contact IRB member and discuss revisions to research proposal and protocol.

Level of Risk: ☐ No Risk ☐ Minimal Risk ☑ More than Minimal Risk

IRB Comments:

1. Update Part 2 and Part 3 to reflect standard review risk.
2. Add you chair information to the Informed Consent and submit the Bill of Rights.
3. Forward permissions from the PSE settings for doing the observations when you receive and prior to actually going to the site.

Dr. Carlos Guzman
IRB Reviewer: Guzman
Telephone: __________________________ Email: cguzman@brandman.edu
Date: 9/1/16

BUIRB Chair: Dr. Douglas DeVore

REvised IRB Application ☑ Approved ☐ returned

Name: Doug DeVore
Telephone: 623-293-2421 Email: ddevore@brandman.edu Date: September 7, 2016

BUIRB Chair: Douglas DeVore
September 7, 2016
Brandman University
Attn: Institutional Review Board
16355 Laguna Canyon Road,
Irvine, CA 92618

Re: Kathleen Mercier, researcher for students with ID in PSE

To Whom It May Concern,

Kathleen Mercier has provided me with a full overview of the scope of her research and I understand that the study would include interviews, observations, and review of artifacts with participants and affiliates associated with the Pathway program. I understand that participation is voluntary and all participants will be presented with informed consent, participant Bill of Rights and in addition, but not limited to, extensive precautionary measures that the researcher has taken to safeguard against potential risks including submission of a standard review through Brandman University IRB, option for use of a cultural informant to navigate the cultural setting, use of a support representative during interviews for non-conserved, adult students with ID, and parent/family assent/informed consent on behalf of the non-conserved, adult student with ID.

Pathway recognizes the efforts of the researcher to further the body of knowledge regarding supporting students with ID in PSE and welcomes her to seek potential participants to conduct her research study.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Emery Latham,
Director Pathway at UCLA Extension

10697 Le Conte Avenue, Suite 659, Los Angeles, California 90024-1533
APPENDIX J

Taft College IRB Approval

Ms. Kathleen Mercier

October 19, 2016

Your request to collect data from the Taft College Transition to Independent Living (TIL) program student population (dissertation research proposal titled Students with Intellectual Disabilities Accessing Post-Secondary Education Settings Promoting Education Equity: Seeing students for their ability first and supporting their development as contributing members into a diverse society) is approved.

Approval is good for one year. All data collection from Taft College students must be concluded no later than October 12, 2017. Any changes to the research protocol must be reported to the Taft College IRB for approval prior to implementation. Changes made without approval through the IRB process constitute a violation of the IRB policies and void this approval.

Please work with Carey Carpenter, the director of TIL, to arrange contact with the students. Ms. Carpenter may be reached by phone at 661.763.7773 or through email at carpenter@taftcollege.edu

Congratulations and best wishes as you work through the dissertation process,

Sharyn L. Eveland

Sharyn L. Eveland, EdD
Chair, Taft College IRB
eveland@taftcollege.edu
661.763.7866
Explicit Goals of the Research

Research Question: What were the lived experiences of students with intellectual disabilities participating in post-secondary education programs in Southern California that were designed based on the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education?
APPENDIX L

Think College Database
Introduction Letter to PSE Administrators

Dear ____________________(Director of PSE Program),

Hello. My name is Kathy Mercier, and I am currently a Doctoral Candidate with Brandman University, pursuing an Ed.D. in Organizational Leadership.

In my growth as a transformation leader, my deep passion for serving students with special needs in secondary school (for the last 20 years), has evolved into my desire to leave a legacy in innovative research regarding students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) accessing Post-Secondary Education (PSE) settings. I have been an avid follower of the Think College research initiative and my study will include use of the Think College framework and its impact on the lived experiences of students with ID in PSE.

I am interested in conducting research with ____________________(PSE) to assist future PSE programs in turning obstacles into opportunities for students with ID. My research will be qualitative in nature and would include interviews, observations and artifact reviews to answer my research question. My study will be reviewed by the Brandman University IRB and will include obtaining an informed consent from each participant and the identities of all participants will be kept strictly confidential.

Would you be willing to meet with me to discuss the dynamics of creating and maintaining supports for students with ID to access higher education and learn more about my proposed research study? I anticipate to be cleared for data collection by the third week in September, 2016. I am willing to answer any questions you may have regarding my research study.

Thank you very much for your consideration and leadership in serving exceptional students.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Kathy Mercier

Kathleen.mercier14@gmail.com

661-435-2083 (cell)
APPENDIX N

Flyer for Informational Event on Research Study

Study Volunteers Needed!!

A research study to CELEBRATE Students with Intellectual Disabilities accessing College!

Who: Students with ID (18-28), family members, program administrators, faculty members, & non-disabled students

When: TBD
Where: TBD
Time: 5pm-8pm
Formal Presentation at 6pm

-Details, eligibility, study requirements, expectations, and outcomes will be discussed at the event.

-Complimentary Pizza and Soda will be provided (while it lasts)

-Researcher will be available from 5pm-6pm and 7pm-8pm to answer individual questions and provide further information.

-More Information: email Kathy Mercier
Kathleen.mercier14@gmail.com
661-435-2083 (cell)

-If you are unavailable to attend, a virtual meeting will be available. Contact Kathy for info.
APPENDIX O

Agenda for Researcher at Information Event

Date:_________________
PSE Program: Pathway/TIL/TRACE (circle one)
Location:_________________________________
Time:____________________

- Researcher arrives 1 hour early to the event to set up technology, food, display resources, and ensure the environment is comfortable for the meeting
  --Participants arrive--
- Welcome! Encourage those who are in attendance to sign-in and enjoy some food before the formal discussion. Researcher will walk around and greet those in attendance.
- Personal introduction from the researcher
  o Background about my personal and professional journey (tell story)
    - What makes me a credible researcher?
  o Short description of my family
- Introductions from those in attendance
- Purpose of the Study
- Inspirational Video
- Review of Research Goals & Need for the Study
  o Approval from BUIRB
  o Recognition of researcher certificate to protect confidentiality
  o Review of participant Bill of Rights
  o Voluntary participation
  o Question & Answer session
- Full review of Informed Consent/assent form
  o Request signatures on the form for those who wish to participate
  o Confirm contact information is correct on the sign-in form
- Review next steps with the participants
- Provide researcher contact information and encourage open dialogue during the process
- Deepest thanks and appreciation for attending and considering the study!
- Conclude evening
- Researcher cleans up meeting space and returns it in a better condition than before the event
APPENDIX P

Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.
APPENDIX Q

Participant Contact Information Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Last, First)</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Phone #</th>
<th>Informed Consent Y/N</th>
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Date: ____________________________
Dear __________(PSE Director),

Hello. My name is Kathy Mercier, and I am currently a Doctoral Candidate with Brandman University, pursuing an Ed.D. in Organizational Leadership. I wanted to follow up with you since I had not yet heard back from my original email about the research I am interested in conducting at ____________(PSE). I look forward to hearing from you soon.

I currently serve as a program specialist for a high school district in the Antelope Valley, California. Before my current position, I served as a moderate/severe special education teacher in a transition classroom to better prepare my students for the post-secondary settings. I encouraged several of my students to apply for the _________ program at ____________ College and I continue to be a supporter of inclusive higher education. I attended the Think College capacity building institute in Boston, 2015 and I met some amazing professionals who were also passionate about serving students with ID in higher education settings. At that time, I was only half way through the doctoral course work, but currently I have finished the first three chapters of my dissertation and am preparing for data collection.

The purpose of my study is as follows: The purpose of this ethnographic study was to investigate and examine the lived experiences of nine students with intellectual disabilities participating in three post-secondary education settings in southern California, that were designed based on the Think College Standards-Based Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Higher Education.

I understand how busy this time of year is as the fall semester begins, but I was hoping to make an appointment with you to share about the study I will be conducting. I would greatly appreciate to hear from you and answer any questions you may have regarding the research. If you are unavailable, would you mind passing on my information to a colleague who could speak with me, please?

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Kathy Mercier
661-435-2083 (cell)