



Students with Disabilities at Maryland Colleges and Universities

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Introduction

To better understand higher education outcomes for students with disabilities in Maryland, the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Disabilities and in partnership with the state's higher education institutions, created a survey administered to colleges and universities¹ to collect retention and completion data on these students. The data may be used to inform policy that may be beneficial to this unique population.

The aggregated data collected reflect the number of students who registered with disability services² at their college or university and report on graduation and retention outcomes for those students. As additional data becomes available, this annual report will be able to provide more detailed outcomes such as degree progress for community college students and six-year graduation rates for students attending Maryland's four-year institutions.

Background

Certain laws and requirements indicate the responsibilities secondary and postsecondary institutions, the federal government, and the state have to ensure students with disabilities have access to the resources they need to obtain an education. Public elementary and secondary schools in the United States are mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to provide a free and appropriate public school education to children and youth ages three to 21 with disabilities.³ By law, each public school child who receives special education and related services must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which documents and describes the special education services a student is to receive while enrolled.⁴

In contrast, higher education institutions are governed by a number of relevant state laws as well as the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act. While these laws protect students with disabilities, they operate differently than the laws pertaining to elementary and secondary education in that most of the burden of seeking support services is placed on the student and the student's family. Postsecondary institutions are required to provide appropriate academic adjustments as necessary to ensure that they do not discriminate on the basis of disability. If a college or university provides housing to students who are nondisabled, it must provide comparable, convenient, and accessible housing to students with disabilities at the same cost.⁵

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

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

³ U.S. Department of Education, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/>

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, "A Guide to the Individualized Education Program," <https://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/index.html>

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, "Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities," (2011), Retrieved Jan. 1 2019 from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html>

All colleges and universities have an office or individual dedicated to assisting students with disabilities (often named the disability services office or something similar). The office has procedures and policies in place to guide and assist students and their families. To receive services, students are required to self-identify as having a disability and to provide documentation (such as the IEP from their K-12 education or diagnostic results identifying the disability). Once registered with the disability services office, students can work with faculty and administrators to obtain the accommodations or modifications necessary. Accommodations can include such things as extended time on tests, sign language interpretation, voice recognition, and screen readers. The nature of the disability – whether temporary (such as a broken arm) or permanent (such as congenital visual impairment) – helps define the time frame and scope of the accommodations needed. Once in place, the use of available accommodations is left to the discretion of the student. Colleges and universities are not required to monitor the student’s use of services.

Students with Disabilities in Education

According to the U.S. Department of Education 6,697,938⁶ children ages three to 21 years old were served under IDEA in 2014-2015⁷; this represents 13.3% of total enrollment in public schools nationally for 2014-2015.⁸ In Maryland, 11.8%⁹ (104,136) of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools were identified as needing accommodations or services in the 2014-2015 academic year.¹⁰

National counts of students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education are more difficult to ascertain, in part because students with disabilities in higher education must self-identify. In addition, issues tied to privacy restrict institutions from providing unit-record data on students with disabilities to state and national agencies. The National Center for Education Statistics estimates¹¹ that there were 3.8 million undergraduate students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education in the 2015-2016 academic year; this was approximately 19.4% of all undergraduates. In the same year, there were approximately 423,000 graduate students with disabilities (11.9% of all graduate students enrolled).

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, ED Facts Data Warehouse (EDW): “IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environments Collection,” 2014-15. Data extracted as of July 2, 2015 from file specifications 002 and 089.

“Number of children and students served under IDEA, Part B, by age group and state: 2014-15”

<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/static-tables/index.html>

⁷ 2014-2015 data is used to match the most current actual data for total enrollment in public schools nationally.

⁸ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education,” 1990-91 through 2015-16; and State Public Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Projection Model, 1980 through 2027. (This table was prepared January 2018.) https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_203.20.asp?current=yes

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_203.50.asp?current=yes

⁹ Common Core of Data, Local Education Agency (School District) Universe Survey,

<https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/pubagency.asp>, Uploaded 11/18/2016: <https://eddataexpress.ed.gov/data-element-explorer.cfm/tab/data/deid/5955/>

¹⁰ A child with disabilities is defined as one participating in an IEP and designated as a special education student under IDEA. Within the contexts of this report, the definition does not include individuals who qualify for a 504 plan.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015–16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:16). https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_311.10.asp?current=yes

A large national study (National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, or NLTS2),¹² provides complementary data on the enrollment patterns and higher education outcomes of students with disabilities. According to the NLTS2 report,¹³ young adults with disabilities were less likely to have enrolled in postsecondary education than their peers (60% versus 67%) within eight years of graduating high school. Disabled young adults were more likely to have attended a two-year college (44%) or a technical or vocational school (32%) than their young adult peers (21% and 20% respectively) and less likely than their peers to enroll in a four-year college or university (19% versus 40%). Students with disabilities were also more likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education programs full time (71%). Lastly, of the students included in the study, approximately 41% had completed postsecondary completion rates within eight years, compared to 52% of the general population.¹⁴

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

It is important to practice caution when interpreting and extrapolating these results as representative of all students with disabilities in postsecondary education. One thing to be mindful of is that these survey results do not include students who become permanently or temporarily disabled while enrolled in higher education. Results only include those identified while enrolled in K-12 public schools. Results also do not include data on graduate students or those who enroll in postsecondary education outside the eight-year window of the study's parameters.

It is also important to note that disability category differences result in varying outcomes for post-high school students with disabilities. Students with sensory impairments, emotional disturbances, intellectual disabilities, or multiple disabilities were quite different from each other in their patterns of post-high school outcomes.

¹² U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Waves 2, 3, 4, and 5 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2009 and Newman, Lynn, Mary Wagner, Anne-Marie Knokey, Camille Marder, Katherine Nagle, Debra Shaver, and Xin Wei. "The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults with Disabilities up to 8 Years after High School: A Report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). NCSER 2011-3005." National Center for Special Education Research (2011). Retrieved January 22, 2019 from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncser/pubs/20113005/pdf/20113005.pdf>.

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

¹⁴ Comparison data included in the NLTS2 analysis and report were taken from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY97) and the Current Population Survey (CPS2009).

Maryland Statewide Results

In fiscal year 2017, 14,892 undergraduate students and 1,154 graduate students were registered with their institutions' disability services office as students with disabilities. This represents 3.5% of all students enrolled in fiscal year 2017. More specifically, this represents 4.0% of undergraduate students enrolled and 1.3% of graduate students enrolled.

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

FY 2017	Public Four-Year Institutions		State-Aided Independent Institutions		Community Colleges		Total	
	Counts	% of enrollment	Counts	% of enrollment	Counts	% of enrollment	Counts	% of enrollment
Undergraduate students registered with Disability Services Office	4,363	2.5%	2,692	9.2%	7,837	4.5%	14,892	4.0%
Total undergraduate	173,555		29,277		172,695		375,527	
Graduate students registered with Disability Services Office	707	1.3%	447	1.3%	n/a		1,154	1.3%
Total graduate enrollment	53,111		34,224		na		87,335	

Counts of students registered with disability services office from the Maryland Survey. Total 12-month enrollment from 2017-2018 *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)* U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. Retrieved 1/22/19 from <http://nces.ed.gov>

Four-Year Institutions

Maryland's public and independent four-year institutions report that 8,209 students were registered as students with disabilities with disability services. The public four-year institutions reported 4,363 undergraduate students and 707 graduate students while the independent institutions reported 2,692 undergraduate students and 447 graduate students.

As shown above, Table 1 provides these data and includes the total undergraduate and graduate student enrollment for the same 12-month period. In fiscal year 2017, 2.5% of undergraduate students enrolled in the public four-year institutions and 9.2% of the undergraduates enrolled at the independent institutions were registered with disability services. A much smaller percentage (1.3% at both the public four-year institutions and at the independent institutions) of graduate students were registered with disability services.

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

Maryland's public and independent four-year institutions also reported on the first-time, full-time, degree- or certificate-seeking students who were registered with the disability services office and enrolled in Fall 2016. To obtain a retention rate on those students, institutions also reported the number of these students who returned to the institution in Fall 2017.

The second-year retention rate for these students registered with disability services was 86.4% at the state's public four-year institutions and 85.1% at the independent institutions. These rates can be compared with the overall institutional retention rates, which were 84.8% and 85.3%

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Community Colleges

In fiscal year 2017, 7,837 undergraduate students registered with the disability services office. This represents 4.5% of the total undergraduate enrollment at Maryland's community colleges. Survey results also show that of these students, 967 (12.3%) graduated with an undergraduate degree or certificate by the end of the fiscal year.

Last year we asked community colleges to report, if their data systems allowed, on retention outcomes data for the students in the Fall 2012 cohort who had registered with the disability services office.¹⁶ Only five of the community colleges were able to report on these outcomes. This year, we again asked community colleges to report outcome data for students but based on the Fall 2013 cohort. Eight of the 16 community colleges were able to report these outcomes. Just as the prior year, these data are not included in this report due to concerns as to how representative they are.¹⁷ All community colleges are poised to report on the Fall 2015 cohort of students for the 2020 statewide report.

Conclusions

Data collected from Maryland's colleges and universities indicate that students are seeking services for their disabilities. The rates of students registered with disability services that are reported by the four-year institutions and community colleges are lower than the national estimates reported earlier in this report (19.4% of undergraduates and 11.9% of graduate students nationwide). One reason for this may be that the Maryland survey captures students registered with the disability services office, whereas the national figure uses estimates based on the number of students with disabilities in elementary and secondary education.

¹⁵ Retention rates for the Fall 2016 cohort obtained from 2017 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. Retrieved 1/29/19 from <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/login.aspx?gotoReportId=1>.

¹⁶ Data are reported using the Degree Progress Analysis model, which examines student outcomes for a cohort of students attempting 18 credits, including developmental credits, within the first two years of entry to the community college.

¹⁷ Because the Degree Progress Analysis data relies on identifying a cohort within the institutional data, institutions vary on their current capacity to "flag" students who registered with disability services within their student systems. All community colleges are putting systems in place so they may report on the Fall 2015 cohort.

Findings also show that students attending public four-year institutions and identified in the survey as registering for disability services had second-year retention rates at 1.6 percentage points higher than their peers. However, in general, students attending Maryland's four-year institutions (both public and independent) who were identified in the survey as registering for disability services had second-year retention rates that were comparable to the overall cohort. This suggests that students who seek additional services are obtaining the support and accommodations they need to successfully persist. Their accommodations may help to level the playing field so that they can perform as well as their peers academically.

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