

## Teaching Post Secondary Students with Disabilities How to Advocate for Accommodations They Need to Succeed

**Background:** Only 27% of students with disabilities go on to postsecondary education as compared to 68% of students without disabilities. Even when students with disabilities overcome barriers to enroll in postsecondary education, evidence suggests that many of them experience difficulty maintaining and completing their programs of study. Slightly more than one out of 10 people with disabilities (12%) have graduated from college, according to the National Organization on Disability. According to many studies, the under-representation of capable students with disabilities completing postsecondary degrees is the result of many factors such as the lack of adequate support systems, little access to successful role models, the lack of awareness and access to technology that can increase independence and productivity, faculty and administrators' limited knowledge of disability rights laws and of appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom, and negative attitudes and low expectations on the part of faculty and staff with whom they interact. Other challenges are students' lack of knowledge about their legal rights and effective personal accommodations as well as limited self-advocacy skills.



### Research question:

1. What are the effects of a self-advocacy training package in improving students with disabilities' accommodation-requesting skills?

**Purpose and anticipated benefits:** The project goal was to further demonstrate the need for and the ability of students with disabilities to learn the self-advocacy

skills required to succeed in the postsecondary education settings and to teach these students and others how to advocate for themselves.

**Who:** Hoang Yen Vo, a Ford International Fellowship visiting student (viewed in photo to right), under the direction of Glen W. White, Ph.D., tested three students who had disabilities (cerebral palsy and a learning disability, cerebral palsy, and legal blindness) before and after learning the accommodation request method.

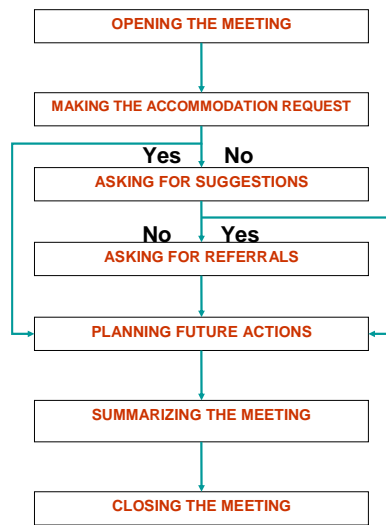


**When:** 2003-2004

**Method:** Seven types of request behavior were examined in this study that included the following steps:

1. Provide greeting
2. Introduce self
3. State appreciation for meeting
4. Mention the referring person
5. Ask permission to take notes or tape-record during the meeting
6. State personal situation
7. Describe the challenge
8. Make specific request for the accommodation
9. State potential benefit of accommodation
10. Ask for alternatives or suggestions if initial request was refused
11. Analyze feasibility of the suggestion
12. Ask for a referral
13. Ask for necessary information to contact the referring person
14. Ask permission to use the university staff member's name
15. Plan action
16. Summarize and confirm future action
17. State appreciation to the university staff member

Dependent Variables  
(7 classes of behaviors)



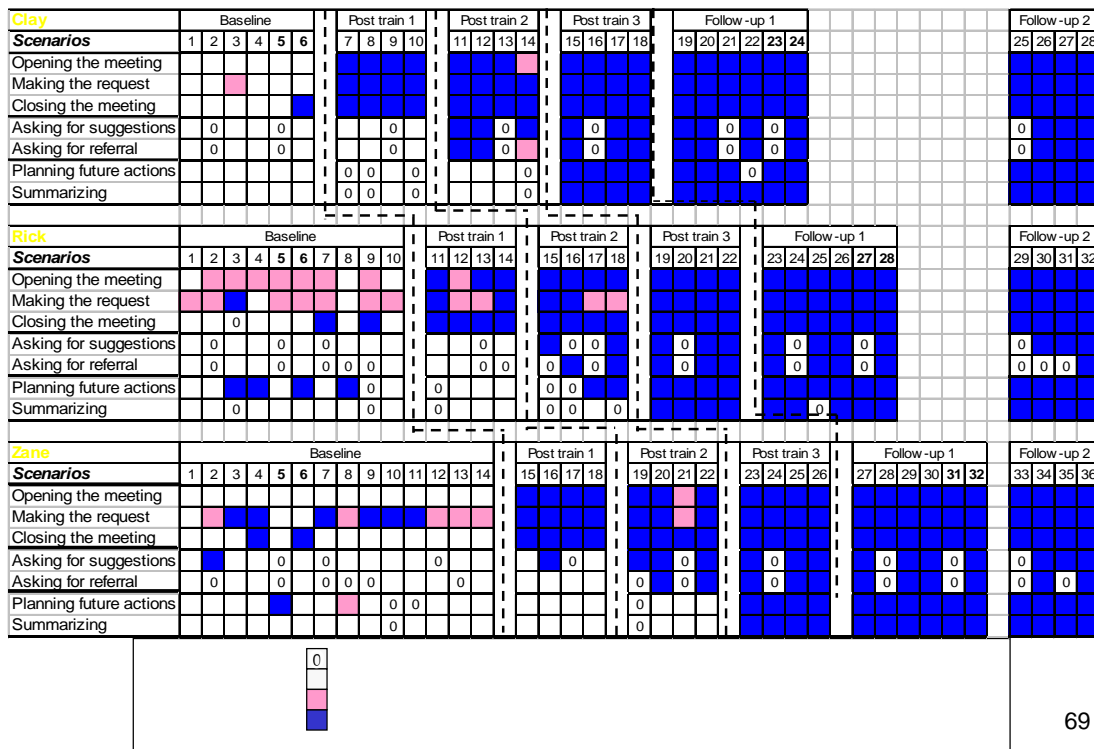
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In eight to 10 sessions, the students participated in 32 scenarios to collect data on their repertoires of accommodation-requesting skills for the baseline, after each set of training sessions, and for follow-ups. These scenarios covered many types of disabilities, and each scenario involved requests for different types of accommodations (for example, accessible restroom, accessible parking, computer with alternative computer input device, note

taker). The scenarios were designed to occur across a variety of settings relevant to the postsecondary education environment with training conducted in a typical university office with the trainer and each participant sitting face-to-face across a desk. A small tape recorder with a microphone placed on the desk to record the interactions. The students participated in two sessions per week. Each training session lasted from 90 to 120 minutes with the exception of some sessions during baseline and follow-up conditions, which did not require additional time for formal instruction. All participants increased their Americans With Disabilities Act-related knowledge and accommodation-requesting skills to 100% following the training.

**Results:** Expert judges' also confirmed the ratings of participants' skill levels during role-play scenarios. The effects appeared to generalize to more natural situations when participants approached university staff members regarding accommodations needed for the subsequent semester. For all participants, the mean scores of behaviors demonstrated after training sessions were much higher than before training. However, the results indicated that participants' demonstration of learned accommodation-seeking behaviors did not always achieve 100% for post-training sessions 1 and 2, even though they had scores of 100% during their practice in these training sessions. This training approach helps participants to learn skills across different disabilities and situations and

## Percent of applicable accommodation-requesting Skills observed



provides them with many opportunities to exhibit their accommodation-requesting skills. Thus, following the training, participants could apply their newly learned skills in any novel situations, not just the ones pertinent to their specific disabilities.

**Conclusion:** Study results demonstrated the effectiveness of an accommodation-seeking training package to increase the self-advocacy skills of participants who were postsecondary students with disabilities.

**Project output:** A training manual was prepared that provides behavioral definitions, specific examples and non-examples of the targeted accommodation-requesting behaviors, as well as specific step-by-step instructions that trainers can follow to implement the training; plans are in place to take generalize this training at the high school level with students with disabilities. This manual also has been expanded to an E-learning module that can be used by student disability services offices at universities and colleges to educate their students with disabilities to request accommodations. In addition, the following were developed:

- White, G. W. & Yen, T. H. Vo. (2006). Requesting accommodations to increase full participation in higher education: An analysis of self-advocacy training for postsecondary students with disabilities. *Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 14, 41-56.
- Nary, D., & Yen, T.H. Vo. (2002, February). Requesting accommodations to increase full participation in higher education: Self-advocacy training for postsecondary students with disabilities presentation at the Pacific Rim Meeting on Disabilities, Honolulu, HI.