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# Employers Attitudes towards Hiring Individuals with Alternative Diplomas

Leah West  
*Governors State University*

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Employers Attitudes towards Hiring Individuals with Alternative Diplomas

Leah West

Prepared in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Masters of Arts Degree in Multicategorical Special Education  
Governors State University

Spring 2015

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Effectiveness of Alternative Diplomas

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**Abstract**

Having career aspirations is a natural part of development. Many students dream of receiving their high school diploma and going on to enter the workforce. However, one must consider what happens to students who receive degrees of completion, certificates of attendance, or occupational diplomas. In order to examine the postsecondary job opportunities for students who hold alternative diplomas the researchers conducted an action based study which used the mixed methodology approach of surveys and interviews to examine employer's attitudes towards hiring individuals with alternative diplomas. A total of 50 participants, who were part of a convenience sample, were asked to take part in the survey process; only 21 chose to participate. Of the 21 participants 5 were interviewed. Ultimately, the research showed that employers are often ignorant of alternative diplomas which may be the cause of the underrepresentation of individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Every illiterate adult is a reflection of the school system that has failed them. It is the expectation that, by the time a student climbs the steps of the stage at his or her high school graduation, he or she has been adequately prepared to become functioning and productive members of society. Many parents and even teachers dream of their children or students going on to be the next president of the United States of America or the CEO of a multi-million dollar corporation. However, what about students receiving special education services? Have they been left out of the American dream? Often students who receive special education work as hard as, if not harder than, their non-disabled peers, but they often graduate high school with certificates of attendance or occupational diplomas (Fairweather & Shaver, 1990). An occupational diploma is one type of alternative diploma given to individuals who develop a trade in high school (Fairweather & Shaver, 1990). This leads one to wonder whether employers are accepting of such alternative forms of certification indicating the completion of general education. If employers look exclusively for high school diplomas, is the school system unintentionally setting students whom receive special education services up for failure with alternative diplomas?

Many researchers have attempted to answer such questions. In fact, Naugle, Campbell, and Gray (2010) conducted a study in which they examined the post-secondary outcomes of individuals with disabilities. The researchers concluded that

students whose school counselors were informed about the transition process were more likely to move on to receive post-secondary education or become employed.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to Ward and Wehmeyer (1995), in 2004 IDEIA or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act reexamined the process of secondary transition planning after noticing that individuals with disabilities are less likely to obtain meaningful employment after graduating from high school. It was also noticed that individuals with disabilities are less likely than their non-disabled peers to go on to receive post-secondary education or training (Ward & Wehmeyer, 1995).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives of employer's attitudes towards hiring individuals with alternative diplomas. If employer's have negative attitudes towards hiring individuals with alternative diplomas then the educational system must reevaluate the offering of alternative diplomas.

### **Questions of the Study**

There is no denying that individuals with disabilities represent a disproportionate amount of the population of unemployed individuals in the United States (Cobb, Lipscomb, Wolgemuth, & Schulte, 2013). So the question remains... why are individuals with disabilities unable to find suitable jobs?

Though the idea of training individuals with disabilities to work in a specific field is an accepted goal, the disadvantages of this practice must also be examined. Do potential employers know what alternate diplomas mean? If so are they willing to accept

alternate diplomas as evidence of the potential employees' ability to work and apply basic skills to complete tasks?

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

It is to be assumed that the study will be limited due to focusing on one geographic location. Another limitation to consider is the time frame in which the study will be conducted. If more time were allotted and a larger geographical area were studied it can be assumed that the results would differ.

### **Significance of the Study**

Examining the post-secondary outcome of individuals with alternative diplomas needs to be examined because the ultimate goal for all high school graduates is to go on and be productive members of society. If employers are ignorant to or have a negative attitude towards hiring individuals with alternative diplomas then the educational system is setting said students up for failure.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Alternative Diploma.** Diplomas or certificates offered in place of the traditional high school diploma due to ones inability to meet a state's graduation requirements. The various types of alternative diplomas include (1) certificates of completion, (2) occupational diplomas, and (3) certificates of attendance just to name a few. Alternative diplomas are often offered to those who cannot pass state assessments that are needed to graduate (Hibel, Farkas, & Morgan, 2010).

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).** The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed into law in the 1990's. The act prohibits discrimination against individuals with

disabilities. Under the act, discrimination against individuals with disabilities in the workplace is illegal and punishable in the court of law (Kruse & Schur, 2003).

**Disability.** A disability is a mental or physical impairment that impacts ones daily activities. ADA has declared that one's impairment need not occur frequently or regularly in order to be considered a disability. ADA simply mandates that if when the impairment is active it impacts ones daily living it should be considered a disability (Bleau, 2008).

**Transition Plan.** An individualized plan created for students who receive special education services in order to support their shift from high school to the work place or to a place of higher education. Transition planning often begins around the time that the student turns fourteen years of age. The student, the student's parents, and the IEP team should all be a part of the transition planning process (Naugle, Campbell, & Gray, 2010).

### **Chapter Summary**

Alternative diplomas are sometimes offered to students who receive special education services (Fairweather & Shaver, 1990). However, one must examine the effectiveness of alternative diplomas in order to determine if they provide the students who receive them with the same opportunities as those who receive traditional high school diplomas.

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Introduction**

Holbrook and Percy (1992) are just two of many researchers that have explored the variations of state laws and the protections said laws offer to individuals' with disabilities. One of the earliest laws meant to protect individuals with disabilities was the "white cane law" which declared that employers may not discriminate against individuals with vision impairments or other physical handicaps (Holbrook & Percy, 1992). The researchers go on to discuss the development disability laws until they get to the current standards which state that employers must not discriminate against any employee based upon mental or physical handicaps.

Several studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of transition planning and the post-graduation lives of students who received special education services in high school. In order to ensure that transition planning is effective researchers have conducted studies focusing on students in both general and special education, parents, and even potential employers. The following examines the research in the areas of (a) the impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act, (b) transition planning for students with disabilities, (c) effectiveness of special education services, (d) students' perspectives on transition planning, (e) employer perspective, (f) interpersonal skills and employment, and (g) accommodations in the workplace.

### **The Impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act**

In the article entitled *Employment of People with Disabilities Following the ADA*, Kruse and Schur examine the hiring trends of individuals with disabilities following the implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. According to Kruse and Schur (2003), the Americans with Disabilities Act or ADA was designed to proliferate the social and financial integration of individuals with disabilities into society by eliminating discernment based upon one's disability. Though the Americans with Disabilities Act was intended to protect or ensure the rights of individuals with disabilities Kruse and Schur argue that the vague definition of persons protected by ADA has led to the decrease of employment for individuals with disabilities. Currently, ADA is said to protect the rights of individuals with a mental or physical impairment that limits one or more major life activities (Kruse & Schur, 2003). Kruse and Schur (2003) argue that the definition limits individuals who may be in need of ADA protections as the broad definition is open to one's own interpretation.

In order to examine the impact that the Americans with Disabilities Act has had on the hiring trends of individuals with disabilities Kruse and Schur first examined a survey that was conducted by Acemoglu and Angrist in 2001. Acemoglu and Angrist survey found that though ADA is meant to prevent discrimination due to disability when considering one for employment the finding that employers are responsible for making needed accommodations in spite of costs increases employers' hesitation towards hiring individuals with disabilities (Kruse & Schur, 2003). Acemoglu and Angrist accredited the

increased discrimination to raised hiring costs and firing costs since employees who have been terminated may file lawsuits (Kruse & Schur, 2003).

After examining Acemoglu and Angrist's findings, Kruse and Schur go on to compare the hiring trends of individuals with disabilities from 1990 to 1994 versus that of 1997 and 1999 (Kruse & Schur, 2003). Ultimately, Kruse and Schur were able to conclude that employment rates decreased for those who reported a work disability. However, employment rates increased for those who reported functional limitations who did not report a work disability. The study also concluded that more individuals reported having a work disability after the implementation of the ADA (Kruse & Schur, 2003).

In the same way, Donohue, Stein, Griffin, and Becker used individual longitudinal data from 1981 to 1996 which was the result of a prior unexploited panel study of Income Dynamics (Donohue III, Stein, Griffin, & Becker, 2011). However, instead of focusing on employment trends that the ADA has had on individuals with disabilities Donohue, Stein, Griffin, and Becker (2011) focus on the impact that the ADA has had on (1) annual weeks worked; (2) annual earnings; and (3) hourly wages.

Just as Kruse and Schur argued, Donohue et al. (2011) believe that there needs to be a more specific ADA definition of what it means to be disabled. Despite their disapproval of the ambiguous ADA definitions the researchers were able to conclude (1) after the implementation of the ADA the employment rates of individuals with disabilities was negatively impacted when compared to the employment rates of individuals without disabilities after the ADA implementation; (2) annual wages were not



typically impacted; and (3) there was little impact on the hours per week worked by an individual.

In the article entitled *The ADA Amendments Act of 2008* Bleau recognized that the ADA implemented in the 1990's indeed had a negative impact on the employment rates of individuals with disabilities (Bleau, 2008). In fact, Bleau declared that on September 25, 2008 George W. Bush amended the ADA in order to change the way that employers interacted with employees. Bleau goes on to argue that the ADA Amendments Act set out to (1) broaden the definition of disability; (2) clarify 1990 legislation; and (3) reject U.S. Supreme Court rulings that had been limiting the scope of the ADA.

Bleau (2008) goes on to examine court cases, such as *Albertsons, Inc. v. Kirkinburg, Todd v. Academy Corp., Philips v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., E.E.O.C. v. Sara Lee Corp.*, and explain how said cases impact the changes in language or the meaning of language in the ADA Amendments Act. For instance, in *Todd v. Academy Corp.*, the plaintiff, Todd, was afflicted by epilepsy from the age of five. Todd went on to be gainfully employed as his seizures were controlled by medication, did not occur often, and only lasted between five to fifteen seconds when the seizures did occur, they did not inhibit his ability to work. However, at some point during employment Todd claimed to have the stomach flu and called off work for two days. After the second day of missing work due to the stomach flu Todd claimed to be sick due to side effects of taking the medication for epilepsy. Being off of work for four consecutive days violated company policy and Todd was thereby dismissed. Todd argued that his dismissal was a violation of the ADA, however, the court ruled that the plaintiff's epilepsy did not substantial limit

major life activities. Bleau (2008) then explains that his ruling would have been different if it took place after the ADA Amendments of 2008. Bleau explains that after the ADA Amendments of 2008 courts found that an impairment that is episodic or in remission is indeed a disability if it would considerably limit major life activity when active (Bleau, 2008).

Bleau continues to discuss court rulings that influenced the change in language interpretation in the ADA Amendment Act of 2008. Bleau eventually found that the ADA Amendments of 2008 led to (1) courts being instructed to give a broad view of the definition of disability, (2) impairments which are in remission or episodic may be covered by the ADA, (3) an impairment that limits one's life activity need not limit another aspect of one's life activity in order to be considered a disability, and (4) a person with an impairment that has less than a substantial limitation on major life activity, but, who is discriminated against by an employer will have redress under the law. A few examples of an impairment that has less than a substantial limitation on an individual's major life activity include but are not limited to: hypertension, obesity, vision impairments, and diabetes (Bleau, 2008).

### **Transition Planning for Students with Disabilities**

Professionals are constantly trying to find ways in which to improve the quality of education and services students receive Curdden (2012) examined rehabilitation providers' beliefs about the service and delivery of said services that are effective in assisting students with visual impairments, who are qualifiers for special education services, transition from school to employment (Curdden 2012). In order to examine the

most effective ways to assist students with visual impairments in transitioning from school to employment. Curdden conducted five focus groups, two of which were with the rehabilitation state agency personnel (Curdden 2012 p.391). The other three focus groups, were with professional groups. The included members of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), and the Mid-America Conference of Rehabilitation Teachers (MACRT) who were attending their yearly conferences. During each focus group, a team of three researchers gathered information from the professionals based upon their experiences and opinions. To be more precise, the researchers posed five questions to which the participants responded. These questions included, “What services do you think are most important in a successful transition?” “What about service delivery methods?” “Do you see most services provided by the school system or the rehabilitation agency or other systems?” “How do you see the role of the rehabilitation counselor in the transition process?” and “Are there any other comments that you would like to add about transition services?” The researchers were able to conclude that visually impaired students who were active in their transition plans before the age of 16 and who had active parents fared better in transitioning from school to employment than their counterparts did.

Similarly, Goupil, Tasse, Garcin, and Dore (2002) conducted a study about how student and parent involvement affects the success of students who have transition plans. A total of ten teachers were involved in the study. Four teachers agreed to write a transition plan for one student. Another four teachers agreed to write a transition plan for

two of their students. One teacher agreed to write a transition plan for three of her students, and the final teacher agreed to write a transition plan for six of her students. The researchers then tracked the parents' and students' involvement with the transition planning and correlated it with the students' level of success after graduation. Ultimately, the researchers found that the students were rarely involved in their own transition planning, but those students whose parents were involved in the transition planning fared better than their counterparts.

Naugle, Campbell, and Gray (2010) explored the different strategies of transition planning for individuals going on to a college or university and those wishing to move on to go directly from high school to becoming a productive employee. The author's intention was to expand the knowledge and understanding of school counselors so that they can better service individuals with disabilities looking to transition into the "real world." In order to do so Campbell, Gray, and Naugle discuss the laws, including IDEIA, ADA, and EEOC, meant to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities. The authors then go on to discuss programs that offer support for students with disabilities and preparing students for life in post-secondary education. In the end, the authors came to the conclusion that school counselors play a major role in the success or failure of a student in their post-secondary lives. The authors claim that if school counselors connect the students to the support systems the student will need after high school graduation the student will be more likely to succeed.

Similarly, Fairweather and Shaver (1990) conducted a study in which they examined the post-secondary outcome of students who were involved in their transition

planning. To collect data the researchers followed a group of students with disabilities for five years post-high-school-graduation. They concluded that students who were able to express their wants and needs during the transition planning process were more likely to become employed than students who were inactive in their transition planning process.

Shandra and Hogan (2008) conducted an equally important study. Shandra and Hogan examined school and work based initiatives and how said initiatives assist individuals into transitioning in to the workplace.

At the completion of their study, Shandra and Hogan found that transition services are effective in assisting individuals with disabilities. However, the researchers did notice that students who received school-based transition services often had a more stable source of employment. School-based transition services also let to greater opportunities for the student to receive full-time work. On the other hand, work-based programs often provided employees with peripheral benefits (Shandra & Hogan, 2008). This ultimately meaning that Shandra and Hogan believe in the effectiveness of transition planning.

### **Effectiveness of Special Education Services**

The effectiveness of special education services is an area that has been explored by researches looking to examine the post-secondary lives of individuals with disabilities. In fact, Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2002), explored the effectiveness of special education services with regard to student achievement. Hanushek and his colleagues used the data from a previous study that was conducted on a group of elementary students who were in and out of special education. They monitored the students' achievement from the

fourth grade to the seventh grade. The authors concluded that individuals who qualify for special education service are able to make greater educational strides when placed in special education as opposed to general education.

On the other hand, Cobb, Lipscomb, Wolgemuth, and Schulte (2013), believed that it was best to examine the effectiveness of special education services by comparing students with disabilities to their non-disabled counterparts with regard to post-secondary outcomes. Cobb et al. (2013) found that, when compared to students without disabilities, students who receive special education services are less likely to take a post-secondary course, obtain gainful employment, get married, and live independently. Cobb et al. (2013) concluded that there are certain methods of transition planning that are more effective than others such as student involvement in the transition planning process

Wells and Sandefur (2003) also conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of special education services by measuring post-secondary outcomes of individuals who once received special education services. To collect data the researcher's categorized participants based upon gender, disability category, and the services that they received in high school. Wells and Sandefur concluded women were more likely to be successful in transitioning to a post-secondary lifestyle.

Interestingly, Hibel, Farkas, and Morgan (2010) also conducted a study in which he too focused on the post-secondary outcomes of transition services. Hibel et al. also focused on the rate of minorities who receive special education service. Hibel concluded that offering students who do not pass state exams an alternative diplomas such as a

degree of completion is almost like sending the students off into the world with no high school education at all (Hibel, 2010).

### **Students' Perspective on Transition Planning**

The student with disabilities' perspectives has been studied as well. Williams and Lynch (2007), explored the effectiveness of transition planning. However, unlike the other articles, Williams and Lynch focus solely on the needs and understanding of the students themselves. The researchers surveyed 100 high school students who were receiving special education services; the study took place at a high school located in Texas. The researchers were able to conclude that both teachers and students need to be involved in the transition process. Williams and Lynch noted that teachers are often too concerned with other students to sit down and speak with each student individually and explain the transition planning process thus lacked time to ask the students about their wants and needs. The researchers argue that transition plans would be more effective if the student were more involved and understood the process.

Skellern and Astbury (2012) also examined the perspectives that students with disabilities have on transition planning services. Skellern and Astbury conducted a total of twenty-three interviews in order to gather data on the respondent's beliefs of transition services. By the conclusion of their surveys Skellern and Astbury found that successful transition of a student with disabilities into the workforce will help said student feel like they are a part of society.

### **Employee Perceptions of Workplace Discrimination**

Employee perception of workplace discrimination may influence the employee's behavior and said behavior may result in consequences for both the organization and for the employee (Balser, 2000). Consequently, Balser, author of *Perceptions of On-The-Job Discrimination and Employees with Disabilities*, conducted a study to examine the perceptions of employees with disabilities.

Balser first examines a study that was conducted by Louis Harris in which he found that (1) 47% of full time employees who have a disability believe that they are not required to utilize their full abilities when assigned work assignments, (2) 30% of said individuals believed that they had experienced workplace discrimination as a result of having a disability, (3) 33% stated that they were given less responsibilities than their peers who were non-disabled, and (4) 30% of the respondents claimed that they were denied promotions due to their disabilities (Balser, 2000).

Balser (2000) goes on to compare the employment rates and earnings of individuals with disabilities in comparison to their non-disabled counterparts. The research proved that individuals with disabilities generally earn less than their non-disabled counterparts. Individuals with disabilities were not only discriminated against financially, but, also when a request for accommodations were made (Balser, 2000). Balser discovered that employers were more willing to make accommodations when the request came from an individual with good job performance, but, were hesitant to make accommodations if the employer thought the accommodation to be expensive.



Blasar (2000) used the preceding information to cultivate hypotheses on antecedents to perceptions of workplace discrimination towards individuals with disabilities. Balsar hypothesized that:

(1) individuals with a higher level of education will be less likely to perceive workplace discrimination than less educated employees, (2) employees with disabilities in racial and ethnic minority groups will be more likely to perceive discrimination than white employees with disabilities, (3) employees with longer tenure will be less likely to perceive discrimination than employees with shorter tenure in their respective organizations, (4) employees who are union members will be more likely to perceive discrimination than employees who are not union members, (5) individuals with disabilities who work in disability-related organizations will be less likely to perceive discrimination than individuals who work in non-disability related organizations, (6) individuals that work in organizations with grievance procedures will be less likely to perceive discrimination, and (7) individuals that work in organizations with accommodation procedures will be less likely to perceive discrimination than individuals working in organizations without accommodation procedures (Balsar, 2000, pp. 183-186)

In order to test the hypotheses Balsar (2000) administered surveys to employees with disabilities as well as to their employers. The participants were gathered by inviting subscribers of a magazine. The employees were then asked for their employers contact

information so that Balser could send them a survey via email; employee information remained confidential (Balser, 2000).

Eventually, Balser was able to conclude that individuals with more education were less likely than their counterparts to believe that they had experience racism. Balser also concluded that minorities are more likely than Caucasians to perceive workplace discrimination. Interestingly, employees of companies with grievance procedures report that they use the services infrequently and the services did not impact their perception on how individuals with disabilities perceive discrimination (Balser, 2000).

McMahon, author of *An Overview of Workplace Discrimination and Disability*, also examined the unemployment and underemployment rates of individuals with disabilities though he focused more specifically on the time period of the recession (McMahon, 2012). He found that the unemployment rate of individuals during the recession was an astounding 14.2% versus 9% for individuals without disabilities; McMahon reports that 14.2% is a rate greater than any other group of protected citizens (McMahon, 2012). McMahon also found that the average duration of unemployment was 25 weeks for persons with disabilities compared to 21 weeks for persons without disabilities. McMahon's research also showed that hiring discrimination is most prevalent amongst individual's physical and sensory impairments; this was especially found to be true when hiring Caucasian males.

### **Employer Perspective**

Since the Civil Rights Act of 1954, ways to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities has been the hot topic (Greenan, Wu, & Black, 2002). In order to expand

employers' understanding of accommodations and how to provide individuals with disabilities and workspaces in which such individuals can be productive, Greenan et al. collected the thoughts of employers during focus groups. These allowed employers to discuss their personal experiences with hiring individuals with disabilities. The researchers used a five point Likert Scale to measure the attitudes and opinions of participating employers. The researchers were able to draw the conclusion that the main reason employers are hesitant to hire non-traditional employees (i.e., employees with disabilities) is that they do not want to deal with the hassle of making accommodations, some of which can be very expensive.

In a related study, Gold, Fabian, Wewiorski, and Oire, (2013) researched the various factors that help and/or hinder requesting, negotiating, and implementing accommodations in the workplace. In order to gather data, the researchers held three focus groups. One focus group was for employers, the second was for individuals with disabilities who were currently employed or seeking employment, and the final focus group was for service providers. During each focus group, the researchers allowed the participant to openly discuss their views and opinions. Each participant's views were based solely on their experiences and understanding of the laws intended to protect individuals with disabilities. The researchers did not skew the conversation; they simply recorded it, transcribed it, and then grouped like ideas into separate categories. The researchers were able to draw three major conclusions. First, employees bear the burden of proof in persuading employers of their need for a workplace accommodation and in persuading the employer that the accommodations will be not only beneficial to the

employee, but to the employer as well. Second, employers, employees, and service providers all struggled with the idea of trusting and respecting one another as they negotiated request. Third, employers, employees, and service providers' opinions differed on the adherence to ADA provisions, the costs of accommodations, and employers' obligation in spite of the law.

Conversely, the Reisman's (1993), who examined the attitudes of employers by surveying 65 service providers and interviewing 27 employers of persons with disabilities. The Reisman's were able to conclude that employers were more willing to hire individuals with disabilities when they had the support of the community. They also found that employers appreciate receiving information about their employees specific disabilities.

The effect that community support has on employers was also examined in an article entitled *High School Students with Intellectual Disabilities in the School and Workplace: Multiple Perspectives on Inclusion* by Bennett and Gallagher (2013). In the article, Bennett and Gallagher examined inclusive practices in secondary schools and transitions of students who receive special education services into the workforce. A total of 91 educators, 67 paraprofessionals, 7 job coaches, 22 parents, 43 student with intellectual disabilities, and 19 employers were surveyed in order to examine the participants opinions about the inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities or ID into the school and workplace as well as the participants level of confidence when working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in the school or workplace (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). Bennett and Gallagher reported that though employers have positive

views of the inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities in the workplace the lack of community outreach in transition planning often leads to the lack of employment amongst individuals in the intellectual disability community. Bennett and Gallagher make sure it is understood that while many respondents of the survey had positive attitudes towards the inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities in schools and the workforce employers were the least likely to report such positive feelings. For this reason, the researchers suggest that job coaches ensure that placements are appropriate for the student and programs that assist in the transition of students from school to the workplace need to focus on the level of comfort that the employer has working with individuals with intellectual disabilities; thus supporting Riesman's (1993) belief that employers are more willing to hire individuals with disabilities if they receive support from the community (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013)

Hartnett, Stuart, Thurman, Loy, and Batiste (2011) also examined the perceptions of employers when it comes to employing individuals with disabilities. Hartnett et al. (2011) found that if an employer is aware of the benefits of hiring and making accommodations for a person with disabilities. The researchers also noted that employers are likely to make appropriate accommodations if said accommodation will increase productivity (Hartnett et al., 2011).

### **Interpersonal Skills and Employment**

Individuals with disabilities often have troubles maintain healthy relationships. Monahan (2003) explored the idea that students who receive special education services often lack the interpersonal or social abilities to obtain gainful employment. In order to

test this hypothesis, Monahan compared the interpersonal skills of students in general education against the interpersonal skills of students who receive special education services. He gathered a group of 48 students ranging from grades 9-12. Twenty-four of said students were in general education courses at a technical school in Denton, TX. The other 24 students were also enrolled in a technical school located in Denton, TX, but they were also receiving special education services. The students, who were in separate groups based upon their special education status, were given a questionnaire. Teachers and employers then questioned to determine which group's interpersonal skills would help them be more successful.

The researcher concluded that teachers believed the general education students to be more cooperative, while employers believed the special education students to be more malleable and, therefore, easier to work with.

Ostmerlyer and Scarpa (2012), were able to draw similar conclusions. Based on their completed an action research study that examined the interpersonal or social skills of students with autism. At the conclusion of the study, the researchers found that teaching interpersonal skills to individuals with disabilities assists such individuals in being successful throughout their academic lives and post-high-school graduation.

### **Workplace Accommodations**

Dong and Guerette (2013) examined the differences between requesters and non-requesters of workplace accommodations. In order to gather data, Dong and Guerette surveyed 194 individuals with visual and hearing impairments who were currently receiving rehabilitation and or other related services in the United States. Chi square and

ANOVA tests were used to compare the similarities and the differences of each group (Dong & Guerette, 2013). Dong and Guerette (2013) were able to conclude that participants who requested accommodations had higher levels of job performance and satisfaction than non-requesters. The researchers also found that employees who made request most often had a higher educational backgrounds and greater levels of reinforcement from employers and coworkers (Dong & Guerette, 2013). The requesters of accommodations also had a better understanding of the Americans with Disabilities Act and accommodation procedures (Dong & Guerette, 2013).

### **Chapter Summary**

The research indicates that, transition planning is just the first step to ensure that all students, including those receiving special education services, have the tools needed to succeed after high school graduation. The above studies have shown that both employers and parents of children with disabilities feel that, the more active the parents and children are in transition planning, the more likely they are to obtain gainful employment after high school graduation. Several of the studies have even examined employers' attitudes towards hiring individuals with disabilities. The most common finding is that employers are concerned about accommodations. However, more studies need to be conducted to examine the employers understanding of hiring individuals with disabilities. More specifically, individuals with disabilities who have an alternative diploma.

### **Chapter III**

#### **Methodology**

This study is action based and used the mixed methodology approach of surveys and interviews to collect data. The purpose of this study was to examine employer's attitudes towards hiring individuals with alternative diplomas such as degrees of completion, certificates of attendance, and occupational diplomas. In order to do so the researchers will also assess employers understanding and attitudes of hiring individuals with disabilities as well as the attitudes of service providers and perceptions of current and former special education students

Through a series of Likert scale survey items and one-on-one interviews, which included several open ended questions, this study examined how well informed employers, employees, and service providers when it comes to hiring individuals with alternative diplomas and the responsibilities they have in ensuring a safe work environment and how such understanding or lack thereof translates into hiring trends of individuals with alternative diplomas.

#### **Participants**

Surveys and interviews were not conducted on any individuals younger than the age of eighteen. The researcher made an effort to survey former students who had an active IEP and transition plan in high school, service providers who work to assist current and former special education students, directors of special education, special education teachers, and finally employers. Participants were all of the greater Chicagoland area.



### **Instrumentation**

In order to collect data a survey to interpret the individuals understanding of transition planning and their experiences with said planning were distributed to 50 total participants. Finally, all participants of the survey were asked to interview with the hopes that at least half of the participants will respond to the invitation to interview. Those who took part in the interview were asked to respond to several open ended questions.

### **Procedure**

In order to collect data for the purposes of this study surveys were created via Google Forms. The survey attempted to first identify the qualifications of the individual filling out the survey. The researchers needed to know whether the anonymous participant was an employer, service provider, or former student who received special education services. Next the participant's knowledge of alternative diplomas was tested. This was done by asking participants whether they agreed or disagreed with a false definition of alternative diplomas. Finally, data about participant's attitudes towards alternative diplomas was collected. This was done by asking questions on their opinions of accommodations for individuals with disabilities and questioning the participant's beliefs on the rights of individuals with disabilities. At the completion of the survey individuals were asked if they would like to follow up with an interview. The interviews were conducted in order to collect richer data. The interviewee's answers were the transcribed and coded by likeminded ideas.

**Data Collection**

In order to collect data surveys were sent to 50 individuals including, 20 service providers, 10 former students who received special education services and had a transition plan in high school, and 20 potential employers. From that group all respondents were invited to interview; a total of five survey participants chose to take part in the interview process.

**Data Analysis**

After surveys were collected and organized interviews with a random sample of those who were surveyed was conducted in order to gain a richer source of information. The information from the surveys and interviews were then coded in order to separate like ideas into like categories so that any trends in the responses were easily noted. Once the data were collected they were entered into an Excel spreadsheet.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provides potential researchers with the tools they need to reproduce this study. The researcher describes the information that they desired to collect when issuing the surveys and conducting the interviews. The researcher also noted how the collected data was then analyzed.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

This was an action based study that utilized a mixed methodology which includes utilizing both a survey and conducting interviews in order to gather data. According to Heibel, Farkas, and Morgan (2010) many states offer students who cannot pass state assessments the choice of graduating with alternative diplomas such as degrees of completion and certificates of attendance. However, many believe that these degrees are the equivalent of never having graduated at all (Hibel, Farkas, & Morgan, 2010). The purpose of this study was to examine employer's attitudes towards hiring individuals with alternative diplomas.

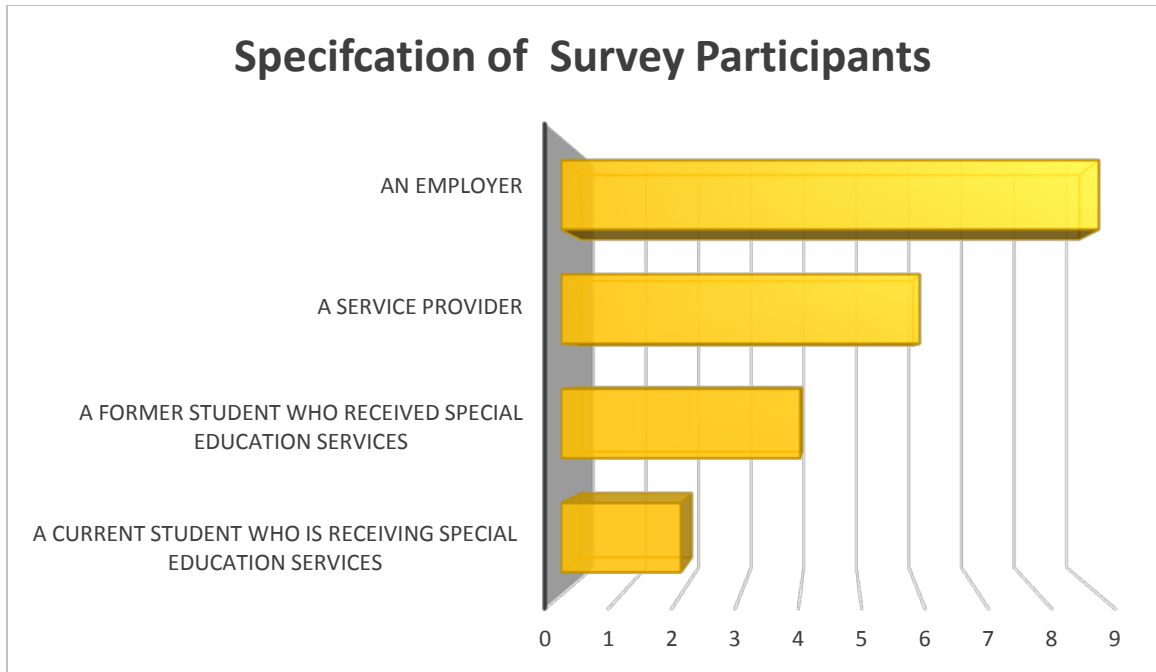
The survey that was utilized to collect data for this study was constructed using Google Forms. The survey was then distributed to a total of fifty persons. Of the fifty people who were asked to participate only twenty-one chose to participate, thus yielding a return rate of 42%. Of the twenty-one surveys that were returned none were spoiled or compromised.

Interviews were also conducted as part of data collection for this study. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain more data rich information about employers and individuals with disabilities perspectives on alternative diplomas, their understanding of the ADA, and their attitudes towards individuals with disabilities in the workplace. A total of five interviews were conducted as part of this study; including interviews from three employers and two former students who once received special education services.

### Demographics

Figure 1

*Demographics of Survey Respondents. This figure illustrates the number of respondents in each grouping.*



The surveys were distributed to fifty people who were a part of a convenience sample. One of the preliminary questions of the survey asked survey participants to identify if they were an employer, a service provider, or a current or former student who received special education services. Of the twenty-four respondents nine identified as being an employer, six claimed to be service providers, six identified as current or former students who are receiving or have received special education services.

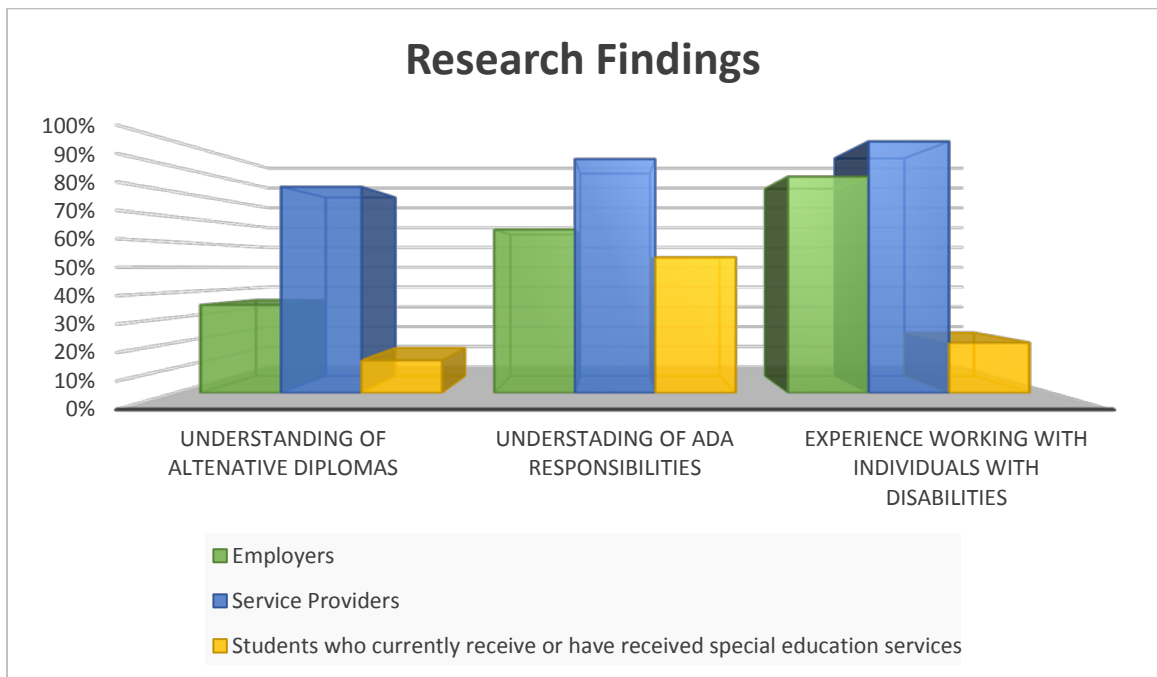
The interviews were conducted by way of telephone. A total of five respondents took part in the interview process even though all survey participants were invited to take

part in the interview process. The two students who took part in the interview process were both former students who received special education services and who have failed to find gainful employment post high school graduation; all participants were over the age of 18.

### Research Findings

Figure 2

*Research Findings. This figure illustrates the percentage of respondents who showed understanding in each category.*



Ultimately, the research suggests that service providers are indeed the most knowledgeable when it comes to understanding what alternative diplomas are, what responsibilities employers have when providing accommodations to individuals with disabilities, and they also have far more experience working with said individuals.

Surprisingly, the research also showed that individuals who once received special education services and transition planning were less knowledgeable about the rights they have under ADA than employers are. In fact, a few of the students reported that the cost of possible accommodations should be considered in the hiring process.

### **Chapter Summary**

This was an action based study that used a mixed methodology approach of surveys and interviews to collect data on employer's perspectives of hiring individuals with alternative diplomas. In order to gather information on employer's attitudes towards hiring individuals with alternative diplomas their understanding of alternative diplomas must first be tested as the survey set out to do. Unfortunately, the survey suggest that employers often lack understanding of alternative diplomas. It can be assumed that their lack of understanding may lead to discriminatory practices or bias when considering an individual with disabilities for employment.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Taking all of the data into consideration, it is clear that employers, employees, students, and even some service providers are ignorant to laws set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act to protect individuals with disabilities. Ignorance of both the ADA and alternative diplomas often leads to discrimination of individuals with disabilities (Dwoskin & Bergman, 2013). This can be assumed because individuals with disabilities are greatly underrepresented in the workforce but often report to having positive attitudes towards hiring individuals with disabilities if they have support from the community (Bennett & Gallagher, 2013). Thus meaning, that if employers are educated by service providers the employer will be less likely to discriminate based upon the type of degree a potential employee holds or accommodations that a person with disabilities may need as long as they are qualified to do the job.

### **Discussion**

The research findings of this study ultimately reflect that of the preceding studies. In conducting the interviews for this study it was obvious that employers had positive views of hiring individuals with alternative diplomas, but, often lacked the education one needs when working with individuals with disabilities. The findings from this study also reflected upon the preliminary research as far as the ADA not always being implemented correctly in the workplace. As the chapter four shows many employers and even some perspective employees with disabilities stated that they believe the cost of accommodations should be considered when hiring an individual with disabilities.

### **Conclusion**

It is obvious that many of the participants of this study are ignorant to or are willing to outright disobey ADA laws. This can be assumed because of the number of participants who stated that the cost of accommodations would be influential in the hiring process. The findings of this study also suggest that employers and students who currently or have received special education services have little to no understanding of alternative diplomas.

### **Educational Implications**

Based upon the research, it is clear that upon employment, individuals who are responsible for hiring should undergo some formal training in laws that were set forth to protect individuals with disabilities. The distribution of alternative diplomas is a practice that needs to be reexamined. Either an effort needs to be made to educate employers about alternative diplomas or their distribution needs to be halted as obtaining an alternative diploma is the same of never having graduated at all in the eyes of many employers (Hibel, Farkas, & Morgan, 2010).

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study was limited due to time constraints and access to the private emails of employers and service providers. For this reason, future researchers would benefit from conducting a study in which they have the opportunity to collect data from a larger number of participants over a greater span of time. The researchers should ask more questions regarding alternative diplomas and ADA in order to better understand the participant's extent of knowledge in each area.



### **Summary**

All things considered, service providers need to reach out to community employers and educate said employers on what it takes to work with an individual with disabilities. One can draw such a conclusion because the research shows that employers are often ignorant to the ADA as well as what it means to hire an individual with an alternative diploma. Perhaps one of the most promising pieces of data collected, employers have positive attitudes towards hiring individuals with disabilities, alternative diploma and all, when they are educated about working with employees with disabilities. For this reason, an effort must be made to educate employers so that the unemployment and underemployment rates of individuals with disabilities can be comparable to that of individuals without disabilities.

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Appendix C

Survey

**Survey**

As a part of the Multi-categorical Special Education program at Governors State University, students are required to complete a research study based upon the area of their interest. The following is a brief survey that has been created with the purpose of fulfilling said requirement. Below there is a series of five statements. Please read each comment and to the right check whether you agree or disagree with the corresponding statement. On average the survey takes a mere five minutes.

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever worked with or employed an individual with disabilities:   Yes  
No

If yes, did the individual require accommodations:    Yes       No

If yes, please describe the accommodations:

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Years Spent Working with Individuals with Disabilities: \_\_\_\_\_

Statements	Agree	Disagree
Occupational diplomas are degrees that indicate the student has achieved a certain level of performance. This type of diploma certifies that the student was present and performed to the best of his or her ability but did not attain the necessary grades and/or credits to obtain a standard or honors diploma.		
It is the employee's responsibility to make his or her own accommodations in the work environment.		
I am open to hiring an individual with disabilities regardless of the cost of possible accommodations.		
Any accommodations made for employees with disabilities should also be beneficial to the company.		
I have partnered with a facility that focuses on helping individuals with disabilities.		

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Appendix D  
Interview Questions

**Interview Questions for Employers and Service Providers**

1. Will you tell me about your experiences of working with individuals with disabilities?
2. What is your understanding of the ADA laws and what do they require regarding providing appropriate accommodations for individuals with disabilities?
3. What is your view on transition planning? What do you think makes transition planning effective? Can you give some examples of instances in which transition planning was successful?
4. Are you familiar with the types of alternative diplomas? Are you familiar with what each diploma represents? If so would you mind providing a few examples?
5. If an individual with an alternative diploma applied for a job and an individual with a high school diploma applied for the same job, which individual would you be more inclined to hire? Would the type of diploma play a role in your decision making process? Why or why not?
6. Do you have anything you would like to add about individuals with disabilities in the workplace?

**Interview Questions for Former Special Education Students**

1. Would you mind telling me the qualifying title on your high school IEP?
2. What was your understanding of the transition planning in high school?
3. Do you feel that your concerns and desires were taken into consideration during the transition planning? Why or why not?
4. Do you feel that the transition planning served its purpose in your situation? Why or why not?
5. What can be done to improve the transition planning process?
6. What is your understanding of the ADA laws and what do they require regarding providing appropriate accommodations for individuals with disabilities?
7. Do you have anything you would like to share with me regarding individuals with disabilities transitioning to the workplace?