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“IT’S RELATIONSHIP BUILDING”: A CASE STUDY ON THE INSTITUTIONAL WORK OF POSTSECONDARY DISABILITY SERVICES DIRECTORS

By

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B.A., University of Louisville, 2014
M.A., University of Louisville, 2016

A Dissertation
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
In Educational Leadership and Organizational Development

Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation, and Organizational Development
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2024

“IT’S RELATIONSHIP BUILDING”: A CASE STUDY ON THE INSTITUTIONAL WORK OF POSTSECONDARY DISABILITY SERVICES DIRECTORS

By

Taylor L. Pratt

A Dissertation Approved on

April 22, 2024

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ABSTRACT

“IT’S RELATIONSHIP BUILDING”: A CASE STUDY ON THE INSTITUTIONAL WORK OF POSTSECONDARY DISABILITY SERVICES DIRECTORS

Taylor L. Pratt

April 22, 2024

Nearly 21% of undergraduate students reported having some type of disability according to the most recent data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) for the 2019-2020 academic year. Changes in federal legislation have increased college access for disabled individuals over time; however, college students with disabilities persist at lower rates compared to their peers without disabilities. At the same time, little is known about the work of postsecondary disability services (DS), which are the primary support services for students with disabilities on college campuses. I addressed this gap in the literature by conducting a qualitative, single case study that used the lens of institutional work to examine how DS directors (n = 6) understood the role of their office within the three interconnected contexts of federal legislation, their professional memberships and experiences, and their organizational setting. Drawing upon participants’ descriptions of how they understood the role of their office within these contexts, I then described the strategies in which DS directors engaged to advance the work of their offices.

My study findings suggested that, although DS directors drew specific understandings from each of the three contexts, they relied upon the combination of all

three contexts to fully understand the role of their DS office. The study findings also indicated that DS directors engaged in institutional work strategies that aligned with what they understood to be their role and purpose on their college campuses. Particularly, the findings suggested that DS directors preferred more relational forms of institutional work, as opposed to more punitive approaches. In terms of disrupting institutions, DS directors opted for more subtle approaches, working their way into campus spaces and maneuvering within established and expected boundaries. Additionally, findings pointed to the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) as an important source of learning and networking for DS directors. Implications for theory, research, and practice are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Historically, individuals with disabilities[1] have struggled to obtain equal access to postsecondary educational opportunities. Changes in federal legislation have increased college access for disabled individuals over time (Madaus, 2011); at the same time, college students with disabilities persist at lower rates compared to their peers without disabilities (Koch et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2011). A disconnect clearly exists between the legal mandate for access and the postsecondary supports in place for college students with disabilities. As I will elaborate upon further, very little is known about the work of postsecondary disability services (DS), the primary support services for students with disabilities on college campuses. Postsecondary leaders, faculty, and staff are ill-quipped to facilitate the success of college students with disabilities without knowledge of the work done and challenges faced by postsecondary DS professionals. In the introductory sections that follow, I begin by presenting data on the increasing number of college students with disabilities, describing some of the issues around accurately estimating the population of disabled college students, and introducing themes from the literature about DS offices and professionals. I then describe the study purpose, research questions,

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[1] I use both person-first (individuals with disabilities) and identity-first (disabled individuals) language in recognition that the disability community is not a homogeneous group. While some prefer person-first language, some with a strong disability identity prefer identity-first language as a means of combatting the idea that a disability is something of which to be ashamed (APA, 2020). The seventh edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA, 2020) highlights mixing identity- and person-first language as a strategy for better educating readers about disability and various disabled communities.

methodological approach, and significance.

Nearly 21% of undergraduate students reported having some type of disability according to the most recent data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) for the 2019-2020 academic year (NCES, 2023b). For the 2015-2016 academic year, approximately 19% of undergraduate students reported a disability in this same survey (NCES, 2021). In 2011-2012, 11% reported a disability (Hintz et al., 2017). In comparison to the general population, one in four adults (27%) in the U.S. has a disability, with approximately 21% of individuals aged 18 through 44 reporting a disability in 2021 (CDC, 2023). These data suggest that the number of individuals with disabilities pursuing higher education is on the rise, creating an increasing need for college and university leaders to carefully consider the supports available for this growing student population that now represents 21% of undergraduate students. At the same time, the estimated percentage of disabled undergraduate students remains below estimates for the general population. Additionally, just below 11% of graduate students reported a disability in the 2019-2020 NPSAS survey (NCES, 2023a). In other words, although more disabled individuals may be participating in higher education than ever, barriers likely still exist that prevent full participation in and equal access to postsecondary opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Some of those barriers may be coming from within colleges and universities. Research that helps to identify and respond to those barriers would be helpful.

Accurately estimating the proportion of college students with disabilities has proven difficult historically. College students may not disclose a disability because they fear disability-related stigma, they want to blend in (Evans et al., 2017; Lightner et al.,

2012; Newman & Madaus, 2015), or their disability is not captured by data collection instruments. For instance, the 2019-2020 NPSAS undergraduate survey asked students to report (a) deafness or serious difficulty hearing (1.4% of respondents reported "yes"); (b) blindness or serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses (2.5%); (c) serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs (1.8%); and (d) serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition (17.7%). The top three reported main condition or impairment types were depression (5.6% of total sample); mental, emotional, or psychiatric condition (4.3%); and attention deficit disorder (4.3% of total sample). Except for the "other" category (2.4%), the eight other reported condition or impairment types (e.g., hearing impairment, learning disability) fell between 0.15 and 0.74 percent of the total sample (NCES, 2023b). Several scholars have indicated that students with learning disabilities comprise one of the largest sub-groups within the population (Evans et al., 2017; Madaus, 2011; Newman & Madaus, 2015). For example, Newman and Madaus (2015) reported that two-thirds of their 3,190 sample of disabled students had a learning disability. Considering the NPSAS survey items, individuals may not consider their learning disability as a physical, mental, or emotional condition, though their learning disability may cause difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions. Thus, the available data about college students with disabilities may not accurately represent the population, making it challenging for postsecondary leaders and practitioners to support the whole population well.

Several scholars have posited that the estimated proportion of college students with disabilities is likely higher than self-reported data reflects (Dolmage, 2017; Evans et al., 2017; Lightner et al., 2012; Mamboleo et al., 2020; Newman & Madaus, 2015;

Slaughter et al., 2022). Recent data about college students' growing struggles with mental health further support the argument that the number of disabled college students may be greater than reported (Gallup & Lumina Foundation, 2023; Lipson et al., 2022). As seen in the 2019-2020 NPSAS undergraduate data, nearly 10% of the sample reported depression or a mental, emotional, or psychiatric condition (NCES, 2023b). In their national study of college students' mental health, Lipson et al. (2022) found that approximately 60% of students surveyed in 2021 met criteria for having at least one mental health problem. Additionally, a joint report by the Gallup and Lumina Foundation (2023) found that the most cited reason for college students temporarily pausing their coursework (also known as stopping out) was emotional stress, even after COVID-19 restrictions were eased. The report also noted that those currently not attending college frequently cited potential emotional stress as a reason for not pursuing postsecondary education (Gallup & Lumina Foundation, 2023). Taken together, the available data, reports, and studies on college students with disabilities indicated that the number of disabled college students is both growing and underreported, leaving postsecondary leaders, faculty, and staff ill-quipped to anticipate the varied needs of these students.

Despite data about the increasing yet likely underreported number of college students with disabilities, very little is known about their primary support services on campuses, which I refer to broadly as disability services (DS). The limited, predominantly quantitative literature on DS offices painted a picture in which they largely serve a legal compliance function (Heyward, 2011), vary widely in terms of funding and services offered (Evans et al., 2017; Harbour, 2009), and lack the resources and training to engage in many advocacy or community-building activities (Madaus,

1996). In terms of staffing, research suggested that some DS professionals subscribed to deficit-based approaches[2] for working with disabled students and held biases against invisible disabilities in comparison to visible, or apparent, ones (Druckman et al., 2021; Guzman & Balcazar, 2010). Alongside this strand of research, studies about the experiences of college students with disabilities (Fleming et al., 2017; Herbert et al., 2020; Vaccaro et al., 2015) and outcomes for users of postsecondary disability services (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2011; Newman et al., 2021) reported mixed findings about the efficacy and success of these services. In other words, some studies reflected positive student experiences with postsecondary disability services (e.g., Vaccaro et al., 2015) while others reflected negative experiences (e.g., Herbert et al., 2020) or found that the use of disability services alone had little influence on student achievement or persistence (e.g., Newman et al., 2021). Although DS offices exist to provide access for college students with disabilities, research provided limited insights into the daily work of disability services professionals in higher education, what information or perspectives they rely upon to understand their role, and the strategies they use to advance their work on college campuses.

Additionally, current scholarship offered little examination of the legislative, organizational, and professional contexts surrounding how DS professionals understand, or make sense of, how they should go about or approach the work of their offices on their respective campuses. This knowledge gap leaves postsecondary leaders, scholars, and practitioners—as well as DS directors—with few insights into the contextual factors that

[2] In this context, a deficit-based approach means treating disability as an individual problem, or deficiency, the must be addressed through specialized approaches, such as accommodations, without addressing the social and environmental barriers that contribute to the social construction of disability (Guzman & Balcazar, 2010; Oliver, 2013).

shape the work of a DS office. Furthermore, the current research offered few insights into strategies and practices that might inform the work of directors tasked with leading DS offices.

Study Purpose

This study had two purposes aimed at addressing the identified gap in the literature. First, a purpose of this study was to examine how DS directors understood the role of their office within the three interconnected contexts of federal legislation, their organizational setting, and their professional memberships and experiences. The second purpose of this study was to describe the strategies in which DS directors engaged—as organizational actors—to advance the work of their offices, keeping in mind how the aforementioned contexts informed their understanding of acceptable or legitimate approaches to their work.

Institutions and Institutional Work: A Theoretical Framework

This study required an organization theory that attends to the recursive relationship between social structures and the actors within them to appropriately frame the study. Although early neo-institutional scholarship is known for focusing more at the macro-level (e.g., studying groups of organizations or an entire field of organizations), more recent neo-institutional scholarship has turned to exploring the important role actors play in creating, maintaining, and disrupting taken-for-granted social structures and patterns (Lawrence et al., 2009; Scott, 2013). Neo-institutionalists argue that the institutional environments, as well as fields, in which organizations (and the actors within them) exist importantly shape and constrain organizations' formal structures and activities (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009; DiMaggio & Powell,1983; Meyer & Rowan,

1977; Scott, 2013).

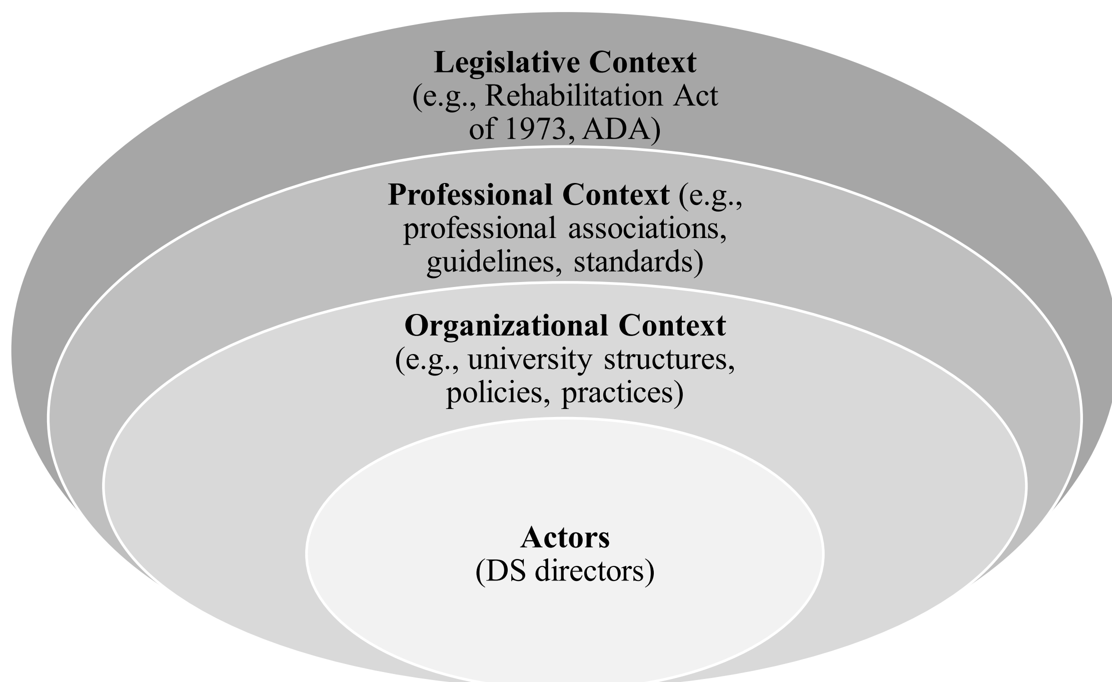
Scott (2013) defined "institutions" as "compris[ing] regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life" (p. 56). Well known institutions include laws and marriage, but important societal institutions also include the social construction of race and gender (Scott, 2013). In line with Scott's (2013) definition, this study used the term "institution(s)" to refer to taken-for-granted rules, established practices, cultural ways of knowing, and pervasive scripts and schemas that work to structure or shape activities within organizations or other social spaces. In terms of institutions, this study considered how DS directors responded to three nested levels of institutions: societal-level institutions stemming from federal disability-related legislation, organization-level institutions through organization-specific narratives and practices, and what might be considered field-level institutions through professional experiences and professional memberships.

Studies of institutional work specifically examine how actors are both shaped by and shape institutions through their activities and practices (Lawrence et al., 2009). Institutional work is defined as "the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). The concept of institutional work acknowledges that actors are embedded within institutional contexts that can both constrain and empower them, while also acknowledging that institutions cease to exist when actors do not uphold them (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Scott, 2013). This study considered how actors, DS directors, glean information about how they should go about their work from established social patterns

and practices stemming from federal legislation, their professional memberships and experiences, and their organization. I also considered the ways in which these actors leverage their knowledge about established social patterns and practices to engage in strategies that help them accomplish, and perhaps even enhance or change, their work. Figure 1 illustrates the embeddedness of actors within the three nested contexts of focus in this study.

Figure 1

Diagram of Actors Embedded in Three Nested Contexts



Research Questions

Using a qualitative case study approach, the following interrelated research questions guided the focus of the study. These research questions draw upon a neo-institutionalist framework to address the identified gap in the literature on how DS directors understand their role and the strategies they might use to advance their work.

1. How do DS directors understand the role of their office within the context of

federal disability legislation?

2. How do DS directors understand the role of their office within the context of their professional experiences and professional memberships?
3. How do DS directors understand the role of their office within the context of their specific college or university?
4. What strategies do DS directors utilize to create, maintain, or disrupt institutions shaping their work?

Delimitations: Bounding the Case

A case study approach is particularly useful for studies such as this study because they emphasize the importance of context (Yin, 2018). I have chosen to study DS directors specifically as a group of actors because they are directly responsible for understanding, enacting, and advancing the work of their office; in terms of learning more about how DS offices operate and the kinds of institutional work in which DS staff and offices engage, DS directors are the primary holders of this knowledge. I bounded the case study by focusing on DS directors at public, four-year, land-grant colleges and universities—particularly those established through the 1862 and 1890 Morrill Acts (Croft, 2019), which I discuss in more detail in chapter three, methods. Bounding the case in this way emphasized the importance of timing in terms of organization creation, which is an important consideration in neo-institutionalist inquiry (Scott, 2013).

Study Significance

This study offered several scholarly and practical contributions. First, this study addressed a gap in the higher education literature about campus supports for college students with disabilities, which I have demonstrated is a growing proportion of college-

going students. Broadly, a dearth of literature exists on postsecondary DS offices, and the existing literature offered limited insights into the work of postsecondary DS offices. Second, by utilizing the framing of institutional work, this case study contributed to a growing body of neo-institutionalist scholarship examining the important role actors play in the creation, maintenance, and disruption of institutions in society and organizations (Lawrence et al., 2009). Third, answers to the study's research questions offered postsecondary leaders, faculty, and professional organizations practical insights into how they might better support DS directors and their offices. The study findings also offered DS directors insights into practices they might implement or adapt in their own work.

Summary

In this introductory chapter, I presented data indicating an increasing rise in the number of college students with disabilities. I then introduced an existing gap in the literature on supports for college students with disabilities. Specifically, little is known about the work of postsecondary disability services and the professionals directing these offices or units. Postsecondary leaders, policymakers, and practitioners require knowledge about postsecondary disability services to make decisions about how to best support the growing population of college students with disabilities. In the chapter that follows, I review the literature on postsecondary disability services and the professionals working in these offices. In Chapter Three, I discuss in greater detail the study design and methods. In Chapter Four I present the study findings, and in Chapter Five I present a discussion of the findings, which includes a discussion of the study limitations and implications for theory, research, and practice.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the literature related to the study purpose and research questions. The literature review is organized based upon the four research questions, beginning with the connection between federal disability legislation and postsecondary DS offices. In the next three sections, I review the literature about the ways in which organizational contexts might shape the work of postsecondary DS offices, the role of DS professionals, and the efficacy of DS services. Generally, the literature around postsecondary DS offices is scant, with some aspects receiving more scholarly attention than others (e.g., more studies focus on accommodations rather than DS professionals). The final section of the literature review expands upon the theoretical framework introduced in the introduction, providing an overview of key neo-institutional concepts and institutional work as well as a review of studies of institutional work in higher education settings.

Federal Disability Legislation & DS Offices

Disability services within postsecondary organizations are generally understood to exist because federal legislation mandates that entities receiving federal funds provide equal access for individuals with disabilities (Heyward, 2011; Madaus, 2011). Some of the earliest disability-related legislation was created following World War II to provide college access for disabled veterans (Evans et al., 2017; Madaus, 2011). Primary legislation shaping postsecondary approaches to disability today include the

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and the 2008 ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA). Importantly, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities; this legislation mandates that “reasonable accommodations” be provided for those with disabilities to facilitate equal access and opportunity to participate in a given activity, service, or opportunity (Evans et al., 2017; Madaus, 2011; *Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended*, n.d.). In addition to broadening protections, the 1990 ADA clarified aspects of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, such as what constitutes discriminatory behavior and might be considered a reasonable accommodation (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 2009). In terms of higher education, this legislation mandated the physical accessibility of college and university campuses and the provision of academic accommodations, within reason and without fundamentally altering curricula (Evans et al., 2017; Madaus, 2011).

Nearly two decades later, the 2008 ADAAA clarified and preserved the legal definition of disability. Notably, the legal definition of disability remains that same: “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual”; however, the 2008 ADAAA challenged several U.S. Supreme Court rulings that narrowed this legal definition (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2008). The ADAAA specifically impacted postsecondary institutions by addressing web accessibility and placing more responsibility on colleges and universities to justify determinations that a student is ineligible for accommodations. In other words, the intent was to shift more of the onus to the university to prove why an accommodation should not be provided based upon the documentation an individual provided (Heyward, 2011; Madaus, 2011). On one hand, the evolution of disability-related legislation reflects

the increasing complexities that arise from the changing landscape of higher education (e.g., hybrid and online learning, changing educational technology) and the growing numbers of disabled students attending college. On the other hand, the timeline of these statutes demonstrates that legislation remains slow to catch up with shifting societal understandings of disability that realistically impact the work of DS professionals. For instance, federal legislation guidelines may not provide much assistance to DS professionals addressing the rise in mental health issues experienced by college students (Gallup & Lumina Foundation, 2023; Lipson et al., 2022) or diagnosed food allergies in children and adults (Ersig & Williams, 2018; Schelly et al., 2023). DS professionals may understandably be left with gaps in their understanding of their role when legislation does not reflect current cultural shifts in disability diagnoses and recognition. Thus, guidance from other entities like the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and professional organizations might be key for DS professionals in terms of responding to current needs.

In response to legislation, many postsecondary institutions implemented some new or revised form of disability services to ensure compliance (Evans et al., 2017; Fields, 1977; Madaus, 1996). Madaus (1996) found that 89% of the DS offices surveyed were created after the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, with 68% of those programs appearing during the 1980s and 21% created following the passage of the ADA in 1990. This research might suggest that postsecondary institutions did not have centralized, specific services dedicated to serving all college students with disabilities. For instance, existing programs for disabled students included terms like "rehabilitation," "specialized services," "handicapped," and "physically impaired" in a 1977 article lamenting the hard work and costliness of complying with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

(Fields, 1977). Thus, prior services might have been tailored to or reflective of prior legislation aimed at improving college access for disabled veterans rather than all students with disabilities. Discussed in greater detail in the following two sections of the literature review, colleges and universities determine their own set of disability documentation guidelines rooted in, yet often more stringent than, the basic compliance requirements of federal legislation (Gormley et al., 2005; Madaus et al., 2010). To understand their role, then, DS professionals may view compliance with federal legislation as a key driver for why their offices exist; at the same time, the broadness of the law requires relying upon additional sources, such as university policies, to fully understand their role and its requirements.

The IDEA and Disability Documentation Challenges for Students Transitioning to College

Although the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) does not apply to disabled college students, DS professionals work with new college students who received services under IDEA to navigate the differing postsecondary documentation requirements and accommodation processes (Brown, 2017; Evans et al., 2017; Hatzes et al., 2002; Strimel et al., 2023b). Under the IDEA, children with disabilities are entitled to a free public education that includes special education services to meet their needs and help them be academically successful (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2019). When individuals receiving services under IDEA transition to college, though, they move from an environment in which they received more early and personalized learning supports at no cost (e.g., individualized education plan) to one in which the goal is to facilitate equal access for those who meet the legal definition of disability per the ADA/ADAAA

(Brown, 2017; Hatzes et al., 2002; Madaus et al., 2010). Disability legislation at the college level places more emphasis on functional limitations by focusing on how an impairment “substantially limits” activities related to learning and performing academically (Brown, 2017; Hatzes et al., 2002; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2008). Some students with disabilities may no longer qualify for disability services at the postsecondary level if their documentation is interpreted as insufficiently demonstrating a substantial limitation that affects their academic performance (Brown, 2017; Hatzes et al., 2002; Madaus et al., 2010; Strimel et al., 2023b). Thus, to understand their roles, DS professionals must understand key differences between the federal disability legislation governing K-12 educational settings and postsecondary environments. DS professionals must use this understanding of legislative differences to help students navigate their new environment.

In this section, I synthesized literature emphasizing the connection between postsecondary disability services and federal legislation. In terms of how DS professionals understand their roles, the progression of federal legislation provides important context for the existence and purpose of postsecondary disability services. The framing of applicable legislation as a protection intended to level the playing field for those who meet specific criteria emphasizes compliance and documentation over notions of support and success. Additionally, legislation is often slow to keep up with societal changes in newly recognized or prevalent disabilities, which likely requires DS professionals to seek additional sources of guidance to meet modern day demands. Lastly, federal legislation leaves plenty of room for colleges and universities to develop their own policies and practices best suited to their unique organizational context. In the

next section, I review literature on the ways in which organizational contexts might shape the work of postsecondary DS offices.

Organizational Contexts & DS Offices

In this section, I draw together literature on the administrative features, activities/services, and disability documentation policies of postsecondary DS offices. These studies and reports provide some insights into the ways in which organizational contexts and DS offices interact.

DS Offices, Services, and Activities

Given the relative freedom of colleges and universities to determine how best to comply with legislation, it follows that university type and university characteristics may influence where a DS office is located within the organizational structure and what services are offered (Evans et al., 2017; Harbour, 2009; Kasnitz, 2011; Madaus, 1996). In fact, great variation exists across DS offices in terms of size, staffing, and budget—even at colleges and universities of similar types and characteristics (Harbour; 2009; Madaus, 1996). For instance, Madaus (1996) found that DS administrators at two-year institutions rated consulting and collaborating with campus significantly higher in comparison to those at 4-year institutions. Harbour (2009) found that institution type may determine whether a DS office is housed within student affairs or academic affairs at an institution. Furthermore, Harbour's (2009) findings suggested that affiliation with a particular unit (e.g., student affairs) might influence the services offered and whether there is a cost associated with any services. Additionally, Harbour (2009) found that larger, more urban public institutions (both 2- and 4-year) often placed DS offices in student affairs, whereas private and more rural institutions were equally likely to place the office in either

academic or student affairs. A key difference Harbour (2009) found was that student affairs DS offices had statistically significantly larger staffing (*M* = 8) than those in academic affairs (*M* = 4), and, in turn, larger budgets. DS offices in student affairs had an average budget of $277,150 in comparison to $126,696 for those in academic affairs (Harbour, 2009). After controlling for institutional control (public versus private), Harbour (2009) ultimately determined the relationship to be spurious, or to be caused by chance or some other unknown mediating or moderating factor. However, this claim warrants further examination.

Some literature emphasized what DS staff ought to do (Cory, 2011; Evans et al., 2017; Madaus, 2011). For instance, several scholars have written about how DS professionals should lead their campuses in accessibility efforts and should champion diversity and inclusivity efforts (Cory, 2011; Evans et al., 2017; Kim & Aquino, 2017); however, the handful of available studies suggested that DS staff must spend most of their time on work associated with complying with federal legislation: facilitating accommodations (Harbour, 2009; Madaus, 1996). While Madaus' (1996) survey collected data on advocacy and community-building work, Harbour's (2009) study did not report collecting data or findings on advocacy or inclusivity efforts of DS professionals.

In terms of study quality, several indicators suggested that current surveys attempting to capture the structures and administrative features of DS offices are not quite capturing the full picture. For instance, Madaus' (1996) study found that 40% of the DS professionals surveyed reported working in an office that was not solely dedicated to disability services but did not collect information on the exact nature of the office.

Approximately eight years later, 26.8% of respondents to the 2004 survey data used in Harbour's (2009) study reported that the title of their office did not match the options available for selection, which included titles such as disability services, disability resource center, and access center. More specifically, 40% of DS professionals in academic affairs reported that their office title did not match the options available for selection in Harbour's (2009) study, suggesting that DS offices affiliated with academic affairs may have more unique structures, roles, and approaches. Further, the report on the 2020 biennial Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) survey results demonstrated a discrepancy between official job titles and the actual functional roles of DS professionals, who, regardless of title, often wear several hats in terms of arranging accommodations, handling grievances, and engaging in campus collaboration and advocacy. In this same survey, only 58% of respondents reported that 100% of their time is allocated to disability services. The survey did not capture how non-DS time was allocated for these 42% of respondents (Scott, 2021). Thus, a critical gap exists in the literature on the activities of DS professionals broadly and DS directors specifically.

Organization-Specific Disability Documentation Requirements

Just as colleges and universities vary in terms of the administrative features of DS offices, studies suggested that postsecondary disability documentation policies vary greatly, too (Gormley et al., 2005; Hatzes et al., 2002; Madaus et al., 2010; Strimel et al., 2023b). Different colleges and universities follow different accommodation guidelines (e.g., AHEAD or Educational Testing Services, ETS) in combination with their own organizational policies (Banerjee et al., 2015; Madaus et al., 2010). Although federal legislation requires the provision of reasonable accommodations for disabled students,

these statutes do not outline specific requirements for the recency or kinds of documentation that students must provide to receive accommodations (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 2009). For example, Gormley et al. (2005) found that 47% of the 110 DS professionals surveyed worked at campuses that required disability documentation to be no more than 3-years old, while 18% indicated that documentation must be "recent" and 3% required documentation to be no more than 5-years old. Similarly, Madaus et al. (2010) found that 43% of the 183 DS professionals surveyed worked at campuses that required disability documentation to be no more than 3-years old, while 33% indicated a case-by-case approach. Focusing in on students with learning disabilities, Gormley et al. (2005) and Madaus et al. (2010) found differences in the kinds of assessments, score ranges, and norming practices required as part of the documentation review for an accommodation request. In another study on students with learning disabilities, Hatzes et al. (2002) found that 86.3% of the 73 DS offices surveyed did not typically accept a learning disability diagnosis as enough documentation to receive accommodations. Regarding the insufficiency of a diagnosis, Hatzes et al. (2002) explained that "the most often cited reason was that documentation did not meet institutional [organizational] guidelines, with recency being noted most often" (p. 44). To understand their role, DS professionals must not only understand their legal obligation to facilitate accommodations but also a complex array of campus-specific policies and practices.

In example, to be eligible for accommodations under the ADA, individuals must meet the legal definition of disability: "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual" (U.S. Equal Employment

Opportunity Commission, 2008). Many organizations, then, implement disability documentation policies and practices to help them make determinations about individuals' eligibility for accommodations based on this legal definition. ETS, for instance, provides the following documentation guidelines for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):

> By definition in the DSM-5, ADHD is exhibited in childhood or early adolescence, although it may not yet be formally diagnosed. The provision of reasonable accommodations and services is based upon clear evidence of the **current** impact of the disability on your academic performance. In most cases, this means that a diagnostic evaluation has been completed within the past five years. (ETS, 2016, pp. 4-5)

Consistent with ADA language, the sample ETS documentation guidelines focus on determining the impact of ADHD on academic performance (a major life activity). The guidelines preference a five-year documentation recency policy but introduce ambiguity with the phrase "in most cases" (ETS, 2016). In other words, it is unclear what specific circumstances would supersede the preference for less than five-year old documentation. Thus, use of these guidelines in practice by DS professionals on their campuses may result in strict adherence (e.g., always requiring documentation within the past five years) and inequitable provisions of accommodations.

In summary, several elements of an organizational context might reasonably influence how a DS professional understands their role. Where a DS office is located within the campus organizational structure may determine the work activities of DS staff, the services available to students, and which services are free or have a monetary cost.

DS professionals also rely upon organizational policies that dictate disability documentation requirements to understand their roles. As apparent from a critical review of the literature, additional studies are needed to illuminate the kinds of work in which DS professionals engage outside of just accommodations, especially activities related to advocacy and inclusivity. In the section that follows, I turn to the influential role that DS professionals play in shaping their own offices.

The Role of DS Professionals

In this section, I focus on the limited research about the perspectives and approaches of DS professionals broadly, as specific literature on the DS director population does not exist.[3] I have synthesized the literature by two topics: professional judgement in the work of a DS professional and disability stigma and biases towards college students with disabilities.

Professional Judgement in Accommodation Determination

After legal and university policy considerations, accommodation requests often require DS staff to use their professional judgement in instances where documentation is limited, missing, or unclear (Hatzes et al., 2002; Gormley et al., 2005). For instance, Hatzes et al. (2002) reported that approximately 25% to 29% of the 73 DS professionals used professional judgement in combination with documentation to determine accommodations for students with learning disabilities, with responses differing across types of accommodations. Gormley et al. (2005) reported that 53% (*n* = 110) of DS professionals reported relying upon their professional judgment when determining accommodations for students with learning disabilities, with 96% reporting that their

[3] Some studies (e.g., Harbour, 2009) collect and present quantitative data exclusively from DS directors about their offices, but do not offer insights into their specific backgrounds, perspectives, or approaches.

office made final eligibility decisions. Considering professional judgment, a common concern among scholars is that DS professionals often come from a variety of disciplinary and educational backgrounds and typically do not receive specialized training prior to working in postsecondary disability services (Banerjee et al., 2015; Guzman & Balcazar, 2010; Madaus, 1996; Madaus et al., 2010; Scott, 2021). In fact, many develop their skills through professional development opportunities via conferences and workshops (Banerjee et al., 2015; Madaus et al., 2010). Thus, DS professionals may each draw upon different knowledge bases, frameworks, and professional philosophies when working with college students with disabilities and making decisions about accommodations. DS professionals may lack important knowledge or skills related to determining accommodations for different disabilities, which may lead to inconsistently preferencing one form of documentation over another or denying certain requests over others.

Disability Stigma and Biases Toward Disabled College Students

Several studies suggested that aspects of campus climate may be unwelcoming for college students with disabilities (Akin & Huang, 2019; Cho et al., 2021; Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018; Fleming et al., 2017; Gilson et al., 2020; Herbert et al., 2020; Kimball et al., 2017; Vaccaro et al., 2015), which can lead to disabled students delaying or avoiding use of disability services (Lightner et al., 2012; Mamboleo et al., 2020; Slaughter et al., 2022). Studies suggested that many faculty are less than willing to accommodate students with disabilities, especially higher-ranking faculty (Cho et al., 2021; Gilson et al., 2020). Studies also indicated that students without disabilities often view students with invisible disabilities as less deserving of accommodations than those with apparent (often

physical) disabilities (Akin & Huang, 2019; Deckoff-Jones & Duell, 2018). Positive interactions with faculty and staff helped students with disabilities experience a greater sense of belonging and feel a sense of success and legitimacy in their student role (Herbert et al., 2020; Kimball et al., 2017; Vaccaro et al., 2015). Negative experiences with faculty and staff had the opposite effect, leaving disabled students frustrated and often embarrassed (Fleming et al., 2017; Herbert et al., 2020). It follows then, that many college students with disabilities often delayed or avoided using disability services because they wanted to avoid being labeled as disabled or feared stereotypes/stigma (Lightner et al., 2012; Mamboleo et al., 2020; Slaughter et al., 2022). For DS professionals, part of understanding their role likely involves considering how they respond to and support students experiencing an unwelcoming campus climate. DS professionals' work may include dealing with faculty unwilling to provide accommodations and helping stressed students catch up after waiting to begin the accommodation request process.

Similarly, a small number of studies suggested that some DS professionals hold deficit-based perspectives towards disability and biases that influence their work (Druckman et al., 2021; Guzman & Balcazar, 2010; Strimel et al., 2023a). Guzman and Balcazar (2010) found that many DS professionals surveyed relied upon individualistic or medical models of disability, which frame disability as an individual problem that the person with a disability is responsible for solving or a medical problem to be cured (Oliver, 2013). At the same time, they found that DS professionals with several years of experience and who identified as female were more likely to view disability from a social or universal model, or as the result of man-made societal and environmental barriers

(Guzman & Balcazar, 2010; Oliver, 2013). Druckman et al. (2021) found that many of the 618 DS professionals who participated in the study held a disability-specific bias that led them to rate students with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as less deserving of accommodations than those with visual impairments. In their qualitative study, Strimel et al. (2023b) found that DS professionals' (n =13) convergent and divergent identities and experiences in relation to disabled students sometimes led them to project their own identities and experiences onto disabled students, make assumptions, and intentionally over– or under–support students. These 13 DS professionals reported awareness and checking of their biases as necessary in their work (Strimel et al., 2023b); they also reported strategies for mitigating positionality in their work, with some seeking objectivity by avoiding emotion and others relying upon personal reflection and consultation with colleagues (Strimel et al., 2023a). Strimel et al. (2023a) reported that those who engaged in more "objective" approaches were often more focused on compliance with procedures and policies. DS professionals hold biases and have their own positionalities like any other group; however, how they manage the intersection of their identities and biases with their work as DS professionals has serious implications for disabled college students, given DS professionals' critical role in disabled students' receipt of accommodations.

This section synthesized literature on the role DS professionals play in facilitating equal access for college students with disabilities. Oftentimes, DS professionals must rely upon their professional judgement to make decisions or determinations about accommodations. Making decisions about accommodations may be difficult for different DS professionals, depending upon their educational backgrounds, training, worldviews,

identities, biases, and bias-mitigation practices. More importantly, DS professionals' varied approaches to making decisions and checking their biases may at times negatively impact the student by keeping them from receiving needed accommodations. For instance, an over-reliance upon strict documentation policies, which often require costly doctors' visits and testing, as a means of remaining "objective" may adversely affect students from low-income backgrounds.

The Efficacy of Disability Services on College Campuses

Studies reported mixed findings about the efficacy of disability services in terms of their influences on the experiences of and outcomes for college students with disabilities (Fleming et al., 2017; Herbert et al., 2020; Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2011; Newman et al., 2021; Vaccaro et al., 2015), which may be the result of variability in campus environments and approaches to providing disability services. At the same time, there is some evidence suggesting that academic support and social programs are more important to college students with disabilities when making their college choice, compared to their peers without disabilities (Murray et al., 2016). Studies suggested that college students with disabilities were more likely to withdraw and less likely to persist compared to their peers without disabilities (Koch et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2011; Thompson-Ebanks, 2014). Although Thompson-Ebanks' (2014) qualitative study (n = 5) offered some insights into reasons disabled students voluntarily withdraw (e.g., disability disclosure/stigma, medical issues, financial cost), authors of quantitative studies were only able to hypothesize about why students persisted at lower rates (Koch et al., 2018; Newman et al., 2011). Such findings reiterate the need for the study and others like it to better illuminate the role DS offices might play in persistence, sense of belonging,

voluntary withdrawal, etc. for disabled students.

Qualitative studies on the college experiences of students with disabilities (Fleming et al., 2017; Herbert et al., 2020; Mamboleo et al., 2020; Vaccaro et al., 2015) illuminated a range of positive and negative experiences with disability services. For instance, Vaccaro et al.'s (2015) study on sense of belonging for college students with disabilities indicated that disability services often played a role in providing students opportunities to develop mastery of content and self-advocacy skills, which contributed to their development of a sense of belonging at the university. In stark contrast, participants across two studies shared primarily negative experiences with their campus disability services office and reported feeling that the staff were ill-equipped to assist them in terms of availability, resources, and knowledge of participants' specific disabilities (Fleming et al., 2017; Herbert et al., 2020). In Herbert et al.'s (2020) study, participants also reported feeling "a lack of transparency" in terms of the different kinds of accommodations they might request (p. 34). In Mamboleo et al.'s (2020) study, many participants reported their DS office as a helpful resource for receiving accommodations; others reported feeling that a DS professional failed to advocate for them. These study findings connected with several prior themes: DS professionals are a valuable resource for students with disabilities when it comes to requesting accommodations. At the same time, DS professionals may lack training and knowledge on various types of disabilities and appropriate accommodations for them, leaving some students frustrated. DS staff may also perceive reviewing and approving accommodation requests as their only job responsibility; given the lack of evidence that advocacy is considered by most DS professionals to be a core job responsibility, there may be gaps between DS

professionals' and students' expectations of the role.

Quantitative studies, in contrast, provided an unclear picture of the relationship between utilization of disability services and college outcomes. Some quantitative studies indicated that receipt of specific kinds of accommodations were related to higher grade point averages (GPA) for disabled students (Abreu et al., 2016; Blasey et al., 2023; Kim & Lee, 2016), while others raised questions about the efficacy of disability services (Mamiseishvili & Koch, 2011; Newman et al., 2021). Newman et al. (2021) found that students who utilized academic support services of any kind—disability services or universal campus resources—were more likely to persist (75%) than college students with disabilities who did not access such services (56%). Nearly half of the respondents (43%) had not accessed any support services. More specifically, they found that accessing disability services only did not lead to significant group differences in persistence (Newman et al., 2021). Similarly, Mamiseishvili and Koch (2011) found that receipt of accommodations was not statistically related to persistence for disabled students (first to second year) in their regression model after they included predictor variables such as institutional price, GPA, demographic characteristics, and social integration. Findings from the Newman et al. (2021) and Mamiseishvili and Koch (2011) studies may be explained by disabled students' documented tendency to delay use of disability services (e.g., Lightner et al., 2012). Blasey et al. (2023) found that students with disabilities in their sample (n = 1,980) delayed seeking disability services for an average of 14 months, or roughly 2.4 semesters. In other words, quantitative studies on the efficacy of disability services that focus on first to second year persistence or lack a longitudinal component may provide inaccurate insights into the outcomes and efficacy

of disability services.

In summary, this section synthesized empirical research on the efficacy of disability services, considering findings from qualitative and quantitative literature. Qualitative studies emphasized the importance of DS professionals in the accommodations process but highlighted that some DS professionals may lack knowledge about certain disabilities and may not engage in advocacy activities in ways that students expect. Findings from quantitative studies were difficult to interpret because college students with disabilities often delay registering with their DS office by over an academic year; however, specific accommodations were linked with higher GPAs. Considering how DS professionals understand their roles, DS professionals may define efficacy differently depending upon their understanding of legislation, their organizational policies and procedures, and their own identities and professional experiences. If a DS professional subscribes to a predominantly compliance-focused approach, student satisfaction and activities outside of determining accommodations may be of low importance to this individual. Conversely, a DS professional who takes a more social justice approach may view their role as to go above and beyond the threshold of policies and procedures to advocate for students with disabilities on their campus. DS professionals' understanding of their roles through multiple contexts, then, may importantly influence the activities and practices in which they engage.

Theoretical Framework: Neo-Institutionalism and Institutional Work

The lens of neo-institutional theory is helpful for considering these otherwise disparate strands of literature about the different contexts (legislative, organizational, and professional) surrounding the work of DS directors. Challenging previous institutionalist

views of organizations as driven in large part by pursuit of technical efficiency, neo-institutionalists argue that the institutional environments, as well as fields, in which organizations exist importantly shape and constrain their formal structures and activities (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009; DiMaggio & Powell,1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2013). A common criticism of neo-institutionalism is the lack of an agreed-upon definition of an institution (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Scott, 2013). Working to provide a broader, more encompassing definition, Scott (2013) described institutions as "compris[ing] regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life" (p. 56). Institutions also occur and can be analyzed at different levels of society, including the world system and societal levels, organizational field level, populations of organizations, individual organizations, and subsystems of organizations (Scott, 2013).

Scott's (2013) conception of institutions attends to several hallmarks of neo-institutional theory. Rules, established practices, cultural ways of knowing, and pervasive scripts and schemas (Scott, 2013) shape social life because they "must be taken into account by actors" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 341). Although these more symbolic elements are often a focal point of neo-institutionalist analyses, Scott (2013) and others (e.g., Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) argued for increased attention toward the role of activities and resources as carriers, maintainers, and sustainers of institutions. In terms of stability, organizations and the actors within them experience pressures from their environments to conform to "institutionalized myths" that help them maintain legitimacy within society (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 345; Scott, 2013). Institutionalized myths—where institutionalization refers to "the processes by which social processes, obligations,

and actualities come to take on a rule-like status in social thought and action"—can arise from public opinion, laws, educational systems, esteemed organizations, or other environmentally legitimated practices for organizing in a specific field (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 341). Neo-institutionalists emphasize the ways in which conformity to institutions is often not in service of producing effective, efficient, or successful services or products (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2013). In other words, conforming to rule-like societal or field-level expectations is often more about maintaining appearances and legitimacy rather than implementing a meaningful change, structure, or process.

Within the context of the study, postsecondary DS offices can be viewed as a response to federal disability legislation reflecting societal valuing of equal access opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Higher education organizations, particularly those that are publicly controlled, that do not conform in socially acceptable ways—such as having a designated disability services office or staff—face serious legitimacy consequences. These consequences might include potential loss of federal funding and loss of enrollment from students who expected services similar or comparable to those at other colleges and universities.

Isomorphism

Relatedly, isomorphic processes are an important variable when studying organizations (e.g., McClure & Titus, 2018; Morphew & Huisman, 2002). The term "isomorphism" refers to the "process of homogenization" in which similar organizations (comprising an organizational field) undergo change while simultaneously becoming more like one another through a variety of ways, two of which will be highlighted here (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 149). Specifically, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) drew a

connection between isomorphism and institutional myths, explaining that as institutions seek legitimacy through conformity to institutionalized myths they may also begin to mirror and mimic the ways in which prestigious or exemplary organizations implement conformity (referred to as mimetic isomorphism). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identified professionalization of occupations—where members seek to define, standardize, and legitimize their work—as an important source of normative isomorphism. They posited that shared educational backgrounds and participation in professional networks and associations "create a pool of almost interchangeable individuals" that may more easily resist other institutional forces (e.g., a conflicting institutionalized practice within an organization) in favor of upholding the institutionalized cultures, ways of thinking, approaches, and practices normalized within their profession (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 152). Considering DS directors, their varied disciplinary backgrounds and professional experiences might create increased opportunities for heterogeneity in postsecondary disability services rather than isomorphism. At the same time, DS directors' participation in professional organizations like AHEAD may encourage isomorphic tendencies in disability services across colleges and universities.

Institutional Work

More recent strands of neo-institutionalist scholarship, such as the scholarship about institutional work, have sought to address criticisms that early neo-institutionalists largely ignored the critical role actors play in serving as translators (Boxenbaum & Pederson, 2009) and enactors of institutions within a given organization or organizational field (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2009; Scott, 2013). Several scholars have criticized early neo-institutionalist scholarship as neglecting to account for how

institutions change, adopting an overly deterministic view in which actors are bound by the existing structures and institutionalized myths with little agency (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2009; Lawrence et al., 2009). At the same time, some scholars have criticized concepts such as "institutional entrepreneurs"—powerful and daring individuals who work to change institutions—as mostly ignoring the institutional context in which these actors are embedded and overlooking the work in which everyday actors engage related to institutions (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009, p. 37; Lawrence et al., 2009, p. 1). Considering these criticisms, scholars have called upon neo-institutionalist scholarship to address this "paradox of embedded agency" more fully; to explore the "mechanisms" or "enabling conditions" that allow actors to challenge, adapt, or resist institutional pressures (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009, p. 42; Lawrence et al., 2009).

Neo-institutionalist scholarship on institutional work seeks to address this issue of embedded agency, contributing to knowledge about how actors and institutions both shape and are shaped by each other (Lawrence et al., 2009). Institutional work is traditionally defined as "the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). However, more recent scholarship has conceptualized institutional work strategies by examining actor agency (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009) and the means through which actors engage in institutional work (Hampel et al., 2017). More specifically, Hampel et al. (2017) identified narrative and identity, relational, and material approaches as productive ways of thinking about how actors go about engaging in institutional work, as opposed to focusing solely on the intended or desired outcome of that work. Elaborating, Hampel et

al. (2017) described research on institutional work as "explor[ing] the practices and processes associated with actors' endeavors to build up, tear down, elaborate and contain institutions, as well as amplify or suppress their effects" (p. 558). Alongside embedded agency, the recognition of practices as "concrete instances of institutional work" is central to the study of institutional work (Hampel et al., 2017, p. 560).

The work of creating institutions—characterized by practices such as advocacy, constructing identities, constructing normative associations, and constructing normative networks— has comparatively received more scholarly attention than maintenance and disruptive forms of institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2009; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Advocacy is a form of political institutional creation work, referring to individuals' efforts to engage in work aimed at securing access to resources that support new or shifted institutions or institutional practices. Constructing identities represents efforts aimed at recreating or remaking the relationship between an actor and the field in which they are operating. Similarly, constructing normative associations is a strategy aimed at reforging the connections between accepted norms and practices and the cultural-cognitive foundations, or scripts and schemas, that support those accepted norms and practices. Along the same lines, efforts to construct normative associations seek to create or reshape norms and practices pertaining to the ways in which actors interact with one another. Thus, creation forms of institutional work speak to the ways in which actors not only work to create new institutions, but also shift or adapt existing ones (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Research on maintenance forms of institutional work have identified practices such as policing, enabling work, demonizing, embedding and routinizing, and

mythologizing (Lawrence et al., 2009; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Efforts such as policing and demonizing represent the ways in which actors might leverage negative consequences as a means of upholding existing institutions. Policing involves enforcing institutions through compliance and monitoring efforts; demonizing involves making a public negative example of someone to reinforce a particular institution as normative. Conversely, enabling work involves efforts to establish additional rules and practices that help uphold an institution. Similarly, embedding and routinizing efforts infuse practices into an actors' daily work that reinforce the normative nature of an institution. Mythologizing as a form of maintenance institutional work involves drawing upon the past to, again, reinforce the normative foundations of an institution (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Finally, a limited set of studies have identified disconnecting sanctions, disassociating moral foundations, and undermining assumptions and beliefs as practices aimed at disrupting institutions (Lawrence et al., 2009; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). These three forms of disruptive institutional work are characterized by disconnecting or eliminating the reward or punishment, the values, or the assumptions and beliefs that underpin a given institution. Oftentimes, creation and disruption institutional work strategies coincide, as actors work to simultaneously tear down existing institutions and build up something new or slightly different (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

From my review of the literature, I identified that a study examining the ways in which DS directors engaged in forms of institutional work would contribute to addressing the current gap in the literature on the work and practices of DS directors outside of providing accommodations and related paperwork. More specifically, approaching the

study through the lens of institutional work would provide an opportunity to explore the linkages between how DS directors understand their role—based upon the legislative, organizational, and professional contexts in they are embedded—and the strategies and practices in which they engaged.

As the study of institutional work has grown, a small set of studies on institutional work in higher education settings has emerged. In terms of methodology, these studies employed qualitative approaches to examine institutional work: case study was the most common approach (Abualrub & Stensaker, 2018; Argento et al., 2020; Nite & Nauright, 2020; Rojas, 2010) followed by content analysis (Nite, 2017; Sapir, 2021) and discourse analysis (Roos et al., 2020). The study of institutional work is overwhelmingly carried out through qualitative approaches because it is concerned with understanding actors' roles in the processes and practices that underpin continued existence of or change in institutions (Hampel et al., 2017). Considering institutions, most of these studies examined institutional work in response to external societal institutions and pressures on higher education organizations. For instance, Argento et al. (2020) examined institutional work associated with integrating sustainability into various postsecondary academic disciplines in a Swedish university. Similarly, Roos et al. (2020) analyzed institutional work practices that contributed to the challenging or disruption of gender equality initiatives in academia. Fewer studies examined institutions operating primarily at the field level, such as Nite's (2017) study of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) engagement in institutional work amidst legal challenges to established policies and practices around compensation for student athletes. While these studies examined actors ranging from organizations like the NCAA (Nite, 2017) to faculty (Argento et al.,

2020) and administrators (Rojas, 2010) to staff such as technology transfer professionals (Sapir, 2021), postsecondary DS directors or professionals had yet to be studied through the lens of institutional work.

Summary

Within the current scholarly conversation, very little is known broadly about the work of DS offices, their features and approaches, and influence on outcomes for college students with disabilities. More specifically, a gap exists in the current literature about the ways in which DS directors understand and approach the work of their offices in light of the legislative, organizational, and professional contexts in which they are embedded. Furthermore, no studies had examined how DS directors engage in forms of institutional work aimed at creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions that bear upon their work. Taken as a whole, the body of literature on postsecondary disability services can be characterized as largely quantitative, with a few qualitative studies focused on student experiences. A qualitative study on DS directors was needed to provide more nuanced, descriptive, and contextual findings around the work of DS offices and how they serve their campus communities. As the leader responsible for aligning the DS office with the campus mission and setting strategic priorities and initiatives for the office, a DS director has power to engage in work that influences the activities and practices of their office. With increasing postsecondary emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion, postsecondary leaders and practitioners must better understand the role DS offices play on their campuses and in the college experiences of students with and without disabilities.

A study examining the ways in which DS directors engaged in institutional work was needed to provide valuable insights into the work and practices of DS directors and

their offices. Broadly, a neo-institutionalist framework provided a helpful approach for examining how key contexts (legislative, organizational, and professional) informed DS directors' understandings of their role. Specifically, focusing on institutional work and embedded agency allowed for exploration of the ways in which DS directors' strategies and practices are informed by and in response to these contextual understandings. Furthermore, because the relationship between institutions and actors is recursive, this theoretical framework required considering how DS professionals' actions aimed to change or disrupt taken-for-granted rules, established practices, or cultural ways of knowing (i.e., institutions) related to their role and work. Given the prevalence of qualitative and case study methodologies within the study of institutional work, my selection of a qualitative single-case study approach was congruent with similar scholarship. In the chapter that follows, I describe the research design and methods for the study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

A qualitative methodological approach is appropriate for the study, given that studies of institutional work focus on "how" questions relating to the survival and adaptation of institutions through the actions of organizational actors. Additionally, a key philosophical assumption underpinning the study of institutional work is that reality is socially constructed, dependent upon and embedded in actors' practices and behaviors (Hampel et al., 2017). As Merriam (1998) explained, the socially constructed nature of reality underpins all qualitative inquiry, which seeks to understand humans' construction of meaning. As a specific approach, qualitative case studies place an emphasis on studying phenomena in "real-life, contemporary context[s] or setting[s]" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). Yin (2018), emphasizing the importance of context, wrote that "you would want to do a case study because you want to understand a real-world case and assume that such an understanding is likely to involve important contextual conditions pertinent to your case" (p. 15). Case study methods blend well with the study of institutional work, which is concerned with the recursive relationship between specific institutional environments and the relevant actors within them (Lawrence et al., 2009).

Unique to the case study approach is that a case must be bounded by specific parameters or criteria. Like neo-institutionalist scholars, some case study scholars and methodologists set different criteria for defining a single case (Merriam, 1998; Yazan,

2015). In comparison to Yin (2018), Merriam (1998) defined a case more broadly as

> a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries. I can 'fence in' what I am going to study. The case then, could be a person such as a student, a teacher, a principal; a program; a group such as a class, a school, a community; a specific policy; and so on. (p. 27)

Thus, a single case might include several components, or "sub-units" (Yin, 2018, p. 51), which may or may not be bounded by geographic location (Merriam, 1998). The specific case study approach must also align with the research purpose (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2018). In effort to address reliability and trustworthiness of findings, case study research typically involves analyzing multiple sources to triangulate findings (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) also suggested that case study methodology can be paired effectively with a variety of paradigms and interpretive frameworks. A case study approach was appropriate and necessary for this study due to my focus on a contemporary phenomenon in a real-world context, my intent to develop an in-depth understanding of the case, and my assumption that specific contexts are relevant to the study findings. Considering other qualitative approaches, the intent of the study was not to capture detailed life experiences or stories of individuals as in narrative inquiry, examine shared experiences of a phenomenon as in phenomenological studies, or explore beliefs or behaviors of a cultural group as in ethnographic approaches (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather, one intent of the study was to develop new and better understandings of institutional work through the specific case. A case study approach had the power to add new, valuable information to the scholarship on institutional work and practical insights for higher education practitioners, administrators, and DS directors.

Case Study Approach: Single, Interpretive Case Study

In the present study, I employed a single, interpretive case study design (Merriam, 1998), bounding the case by studying DS directors at public, four-year, land-grant colleges and universities—particularly those established through the 1862 and 1890 Morrill Acts[4] (Croft, 2019). Interpretive case studies use "descriptive data…to develop conceptual categories or to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering," often involving "abstraction" such as suggesting relationships or developing theory (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). I bounded my case to colleges and universities established by the 1862 and 1890 Morrill Acts because neo-institutionalists have argued that organizations that arose or developed at the same time exhibit similar characteristics in terms of structure and occupations, with universities provided as an example of this phenomenon (Scott, 2013). While the 1862 Morrill Act provided land or land scrips for the establishment of land-grant colleges and universities, the 1890 Morrill Act set aside additional funds for supporting the land-grant colleges and universities established in 1862. However, use of the 1890 funds prohibited racial discrimination in admissions policies but allowed for the creation of "separate [colleges and universities] 'of like character' for white and non-white students" (Croft, 2019, p. 5). Thus, 19 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were established under

[4] Colleges and universities that receive annual federal appropriations under the Morrill Acts are considered land-grant colleges and universities. The intent behind these Acts was to establish colleges and universities with programs in agriculture and mechanical arts (the "A & M" in some university names) alongside other common postsecondary programs. Fifty-seven colleges and universities were established under the 1862 Act; there is at least one 1862 postsecondary school in each U.S. state and territory (including the District of Columbia). Nineteen colleges and universities were established in 1890, all of which are Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); these postsecondary schools are mostly concentrated in the southeastern part of the U.S. Beginning in 1994, 36 additional land-grant colleges and universities were established, all of which are Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). Unlike the original 1862 institutions, the TCUs received appropriated endowment funds rather than land or land scrips (Croft, 2019).

the 1890 Morrill Act.

Additionally, the first postsecondary DS program was offered at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Tamura, 2008), a land-grant university (Croft, 2019). The existence of this program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign may have led other land-grant colleges and universities to engage in isomorphic behaviors (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) around developing disability services. Thus, bounding my case based upon time of organization creation is particularly useful for neo-institutionalist inquiry. This bounding strategy also appropriately narrows the focus of the case study to a group of colleges and universities with a shared background, with leaders who may have borrowed approaches or templates from their peers or sought to differentiate their organizations.

As discussed in the data analysis sections, I examined the study findings within the context of current assumptions and suggested relationships between findings. Consistent with a case study approach, I relied upon multiple sources of evidence including interviews, university mission statements, and DS office webpages. As opposed to generating generalizable findings, the study purpose was to describe in-depth the ongoing processes and practices of institutional work as the study participants described it. Importantly, I did not seek to solely "develop *converging lines of inquiry*" (Yin, 2018, p. 127). Rather, I sought a holistic understanding of the case (Mathison, 1988).

Research Design Quality

I used several strategies (Anfara et al., 2002) or tactics (Yin, 2018) to ensure quality within the design of the study. Table 1 outlines the strategies I used to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability within this qualitative study.

Although I address most of these strategies within the following data collection and analysis sections, I address the role of researcher reflexivity up front. As I share later in my positionality statement, my own experiences served as strong motivators for this research; however, I needed to ensure that my own experiences with and preconceptions about accommodations in higher education did not overshadow the emerging patterns and themes from the data. Memoing (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) throughout the data collection and analysis processes served as a key strategy for tracking and reflecting upon my initial and evolving reactions to and questions about the data. The process of continuously examining my own positionality as a researcher throughout the study design, pilot, revision, data collection, and data analysis phases led me to implement several other quality assurance strategies, such as triangulation, flexible research design, explanation building, etc. to check and challenge my interpretations.

Data Collection and Sources

During the study design and planning stage, I anticipated interviewing between five and ten directors for this case study and subsequently collecting several additional case records (Yin, 2018) associated with each interviewee's university. The case records for the study included interview transcripts, participant demographic survey data, university mission statements, DS office homepages and sub-pages, and any specific university policies or handbooks referenced by participants, as available. Data collection for the study was not limited based on an ideal number of participants or case records. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommended that qualitative researchers seek "a point of saturation or redundancy" when considering sample size (p. 101). Reaching a point of saturation means that "you begin hearing the same responses to your interview questions

or…no new insights are forthcoming" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 101). In terms of sampling, I recruited participants and conducted interviews with the goal of achieving data saturation. Engaging in data analysis throughout the data collection phase was integral to keeping a pulse on data saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Table 1

Strategies for Ensuring Quality Research Design

Quantitative Term	Qualitative Term	Strategy Employed
Internal Validity	Credibility	• Triangulation • Explanation Building • Use of Logic Models
External Validity	Transferability	• Purposive Sampling • Thick Description
Reliability	Dependability	• Description of Flexible Research Design • Triangulation
Objectivity	Confirmability	• Researcher Reflexivity • Triangulation

Note. Adapted from "Qualitative analysis on stage: Making the research process more public," by V. A. Anfara, K. M. Brown, & T. L. Mangione, 2002, *Educational Researcher,* 31(7), p. 30.

Sample

I used purposive, or purposeful, sampling in the study, seeking out "typical" cases. Purposive sampling is a technique for addressing transferability of findings by allowing researchers to tailor the sample to their specific research purposes (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In combination with a clearly bounded case, purposive sampling allowed me to carefully consider the transferability of findings within and across postsecondary contexts (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2018). As previously discussed,

rather than aiming for a specific number of case records/participants, I sought to achieve data saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The case was bounded to only include DS directors at public, four-year, land-grant colleges and universities within the U.S. established by the 1862 or 1890 Morrill Acts (Croft, 2019). I did not place any exclusion criteria around university geographic location; director duration in position; or DS office name, size, or reporting structure. Participants were required to hold the formal title of director, as opposed to coordinator, administrator, coach, etc. As the limited literature points out, DS offices go by many names, vary in terms of staffing and size, and are housed in a variety of units (Harbour, 2009). Additionally, interim directors were excluded, as individuals temporarily filling the position may not have the same decision-making authority as an institutional actor and/or knowledge of the role and DS office.

To determine the pool of eligible participants, I developed a database of contact information for DS directors at land-grant colleges and universities that meet the public, four-year university criteria. I began with a list of 76 colleges and universities established by the 1862 and 1890 Morrill Acts (Croft, 2019). Although the entire University of California (UC) system holds a land-grant designation, only UC Berkley was included to avoid oversaturating the sample with UC system universities. I selected UC Berkley because it was the first land-grant university in California. As a first step, private universities and universities provided an 1862 land-grant designation in the 20th century under the 1862 Morrill Act were excluded from the list of potential participants (n = 9). I excluded private universities for a few key reasons. Private universities are funded quite differently (e.g., student tuition, donor contributions, endowments) from public universities, which are largely government funded and bound by additional laws and

mandates to access this funding. Although the ADA applies to both public and private universities, the broader legislative context differs for public and private universities (e.g., free speech). Thus, private universities were excluded to carefully consider interpretation and transferability of findings. In addition to considering the time difference, I excluded universities given a land grant designation in the 20th century because these universities received different federal support than that received by the original 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities. Importantly, these later land-grant universities received appropriated endowment funds rather than land (Croft, 2019). Given the time and support differences, these universities do not have the same shared background when compared to the rest of the group, which could impact interpretation and transferability of findings.

Next, I reviewed the public website for each DS office for the remaining universities (n = 67). At this stage, universities were excluded if a DS director was not listed on the DS office webpage or other available university directories or organizational charts. Additionally, some universities were excluded because they did not provide a publicly available email address for the DS director. Sixteen universities were excluded for these reasons. During the recruitment phase, three more universities were excluded based upon undeliverable emails and automatic replies indicating the DS director had left their position. Thus, 48 DS directors at public, land-grant universities comprised the final number of eligible potential participants.

Recruitment

While studies of DS offices have often relied upon AHEAD study approval and dissemination for participant recruitment (e.g., Guzman & Balcazar, 2010; Harbour et al.,

2009; Strimel et al., 2023a, 2023b), I recruited eligible participants via their university email to avoid introducing a bias into the study. In other words, limiting the study to AHEAD members would have resulted in findings only applicable to this sub-set of the population. In the findings and discussion chapters, I consider the influence of AHEAD membership on DS professionals' understanding of their role alongside other professional memberships (research question three).

Using the database previously described, I sent an email invitation to all eligible participants (n = 48). The recruitment email included a description of the project and purpose, IRB approval information, and anticipated time commitment. When a potential participant expressed interest in participating, I used email correspondence to provide the informed consent document for participant review and signature, schedule the interview, and request that the participant complete a short demographic questionnaire prior to the interview. Out of the 48 individuals invited to participate, eight expressed interest in participating in the study. Six of these individuals participated in the study, completing the demographic questionnaire and interview.

Demographic Questionnaire

After agreeing to participate in the study, each participant was asked to complete an online demographic questionnaire via Qualtrics prior to the interview. The demographic questionnaire collected information on position title, university name, office name, office reporting structure, educational background, number of years in current position, number of years worked in disability services and higher education, professional memberships, gender, race, and ethnicity (see Appendix A). Five of the six participants

completed the demographic questionnaire prior to the interview; one chose to complete after the interview.

The demographic questionnaire served two primary purposes: First, the demographic questionnaire provided a method of describing key characteristics of the sample comprising the single-case study. Secondly, the demographic questionnaire provided a means of verifying helpful details about each participant's role, background, and experiences that were often relevant to their interview responses. Except for the one questionnaire completed after the interview, I reviewed each participant's responses prior to their interview to better inform my follow-up and probing questions. For example, when participants described participating in their larger "unit" or "division," I was able to ask better probing questions about how their affiliation with a particular unit factored into their work and the larger understanding of their director role. Although exact titles of the offices are withheld to provide and ensure anonymity, I addressed noteworthy aspects of office titles, such as those containing the word "access" rather than "disability" (e.g., Office of Accessibility) in the findings and discussion sections to consider the role that shifting cultural understandings of disability play in the work of a DS office.

Semi-Structured Interviews

As part of my approach to dependability (Anfara et al., 2002; Merriam, 1998), I used a flexible research design so that I adapted to the changing needs of the study. The semi-structured interview protocol was refined through several iterations. Through conducting three pilot interviews across 2021-2022, I refined my research questions and interview protocol to rephrase potentially leading or confusing questions and eliminate redundancy. The original probing questions were too broad and asked the participants to

consider and address many items at once. Through the dissertation proposal process, I further refined the interview questions to better address the research questions guiding the study, drawing upon key concepts from neo-institutional theory (Glesne, 2016).

Drawing upon neo-institutional theory, the interview questions were designed to collect data about how DS directors understand the role of their office within the three contexts of federal legislation, their organizational setting, and their professional memberships and experiences. Further, several of the interview protocol questions were aimed at eliciting descriptions of the institutional work strategies or practices in which DS directors engage. Table 2 presents the interview questions, and Table 3 shows their alignment with the study research questions. Appendix B contains the full interview protocol. The final interview protocol contained 15 main questions and several follow-up or probing questions interspersed throughout the protocol (Glesne, 2016). The semi-structured approach allowed for tailoring or adding a probing question in the moment to elicit further detail (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glesne, 2016).

I conducted one semi-structured, virtual video interview with each participant (n = 6) via Zoom. The interviews lasted between 45 and 57 minutes across participants. Each interview was video recorded using Zoom's built-in recording feature. The interview video recording was then imported into Otter.ai, an AI transcription web application. Within the Otter.ai platform, I reviewed and cleaned each transcript in preparation for the data analysis phase. This preparation included de-identifying each transcript by inserting pseudonyms for each participant and redacting references to the university, state, unique office name, any named coworkers or supervisors, etc.

Table 2

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview Question
1. What do you see as the key functions of your office? a. What are your primary responsibilities as director? 2. In what ways have your previous personal and professional experiences informed your work as a director? a. What motivated you to pursue your current role? 3. In what ways do your professional affiliations and memberships inform your work as a director? 4. What can you tell me about the history of your office? a. What significant changes, if any, has your office undergone? Why did these changes occur? b. How long has your office had its current name? Why did the name change, and what were the intended outcomes of that change? 5. What is the role of disability-related legislation in your work? a. What challenges does your office face related to legislation? b. Suppose someone states that your office only exists to comply with federal legislation—how would you respond in your capacity as director? 6. What is your perception of what campus leaders think your office does? a. What is your perception of what faculty members think your office does? b. What is your perception of what students think your office does? c. What complications, if any, result from campus perceptions of your work? d. How do you address misperceptions held by any of these groups or individuals? 7. What policies are your office expected to follow? a. In what ways do these policies help the work of your office? Hinder your work? 8. What practices are your office expected to follow? a. In what ways do these practices help your work? Hinder your work? 9. In what ways does your office measure success? a. In what ways does your office contribute to achieving the campus mission? 10. How do you uphold current policies and practices? 11. In what ways, if any, have you expanded the services of your office? If so, how did you accomplish that expansion?

12. In what ways, if any, have you made other changes to the work of your office? How did you accomplish those changes?
13. How have you navigated making any changes to policies and practices?
14. Please give me an example of when you had a conflict in your work. How did you navigate that conflict?
15. How have you navigated gaining support on campus for your work?
16. Is there anything else you would like to share? Are there any other questions you wish I would have asked?

Table 3

Alignment of Interview Questions with Research Questions

Research Question	Interview Question
1. How do DS directors understand the role of their office within the context of federal disability legislation?	1, 1a, 4, 4a, 4b, 5, 5a, 5b, 7, 7a, 8, 8a, 9
2. How do DS directors understand the role of their office within the context of their professional experiences and professional memberships?	1, 1a, 2, 2a, 3, 3a, 7, 7a, 8, 8a, 9
3. How do DS directors understand the role of their office within the context of their specific college or university?	1, 1a, 4, 4a, 4b, 6, 6a, 6b, 6c, 7, 7a, 8, 8a, 9, 9a
4. What strategies do DS directors utilize to create, maintain, or disrupt institutions shaping their work?	4a, 4b, 6d, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

Note. Adapted from "Qualitative analysis on stage: Making the research process more public," by V. A. Anfara, K. M. Brown, & T. L. Mangione, 2002, *Educational Researcher,* 31(7), p. 31.

Collection of Additional Case Records

In addition to interview and demographic data, I collected university mission statements, DS office homepages and sub-pages, and relevant DRC policies referenced by participants, as available.[5] Table 4 provides an overview of the main additional case records collected and a brief description of each record. I collected and analyzed these additional case records after a participant completed their interview, so that participant interview data could inform the collection of relevant documents. I also chose not to review any of documents beforehand to avoid influencing the questions I asked or my initial reflections about the interview. I did not require participants to provide any documents to avoid participation in the study becoming overly burdensome. These additional case records were used to corroborate aspects of the interview data, such as participants' descriptions of their alignment with organizational mission and context, the history of their office, their reporting structure, among other details.

Broadly, triangulation was used throughout the study to address credibility, dependability, and confirmability of findings (Anfara et al., 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2016). In other words, these additional sources were analyzed and compared back to the interview data to ensure confidence in the interpretation of data and findings. Additionally, these case records served as another data source for examining the institutional work of DS directors. For example, every DS office webpage included language around their office's purpose to ensure equal access and to collaborate with others on campus. Each DS office website included "for students" and "for faculty"

[5] One participant referenced a specific university policy document that I was unable to access as someone outside of the organization; this document contained rules and regulations that guided several university campuses.

pages. The "for faculty" pages typically included language around a commitment to partnering or collaborating with faculty on accommodations and access. Thus, these documents provided a more holistic view of DS directors' perceptions of their office and efforts to fulfill that office's purpose.

Table 4

Description of Additional Case Records

Case Record	Description
University mission statement	A university's written statement describing its purpose and commitments.
DS Office "About Us" page	This page typically included the DS office mission statement, all of which stated their commitment to providing equal access for students with disabilities. Many of these mission statements included a commitment to "collaboration." These pages included links to staff listings, too. These pages sometimes included links to social media, news, and campus events.
DS Office "For Students" page and sub-pages	These webpages typically highlighted various services offered by the DS office, provided guidance on specific accommodations, and included instructions for getting started. If the term collaboration was not already included in the DS office mission statement, it appeared on this page. This page typically included a link to or sub-pages on the appeals and grievances processes.
DS Office "Documentation" or "Registration" pages	A few DS offices had separate links or webpages sharing disability documentation guidelines or registration processes, likely to ensure these pages were easily found and accessible.
DS Office "For Faculty" page and sub-pages	These webpages shared resources for faculty on handling accommodation requests, creating accessible course materials, and working with the DS office on processes like testing. These pages included a statement of the DS office's commitment to collaborating or partnering with faculty.
DS Office "For Parents" page	Two DS office websites featured pages aimed at parents/families. These pages focused on the transition from high school to college.

Ethical Considerations

In terms of ethics, I worked to ensure that each participant understood the nature of the study and how the information will be used (i.e., IRB approved study used for dissertation and scholarly publication). Prior to the interview, I sent participants the informed consent document by email with a short explanation of the information contained in the document. I asked participants to sign and return if comfortable, offered to answer any questions, and stated that I would review the informed consent document prior to the start of their interview. At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the study purpose and asked participants if they had any questions about the study or informed consent document. For each participant, I reiterated how I would work to protect their privacy, such as using pseudonyms for each participant. I also reminded each participant that they may request that the interview recording be stopped or paused at any time. I used pseudonyms for all participants and omitted identifying information about the participants and their institutions.

When designing the interview protocol, I worked to scaffold questions in a way that built to the potentially most sensitive or uncomfortable questions, which are about campus perceptions of the office, barriers around policies and practices, and conflict in their work. My goal was to build trust with the participants leading up to that point so that they might feel more comfortable talking about conflict or challenges they may experience in their work (Glesne, 2016). Participants expressed their support for such a study, suggesting that any potential risks to participants might be outweighed by the benefit of illuminating the complexities of the work of DS directors.

Data Analysis

I employed an inductive, iterative coding process to reduce the data to key themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2016). I engaged in data analysis throughout the data collection process to achieve data saturation. In terms of data analysis, reaching data saturation means that no new categories, themes, or findings emerge as new data is collected and analyzed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I began with structural coding as a first cycle coding method, followed by In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2016). Structural coding is "question-based coding," that aligns large segments of text with the relevant research question (Saldaña, 2016, p. 98). In Vivo coding, in contrast, relies upon the actual words of participants to generate codes. I used descriptive, or topical, coding on the additional data sources for descriptive and triangulation purposes (Saldaña, 2016). I kept analytic memos throughout the coding process to track developments, questions, tensions, changes in thinking, etc. (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1998; Miles et al., 2019; Saldaña, 2016).

For my first iteration of structural coding, I used my aligned research and interview questions (see Table 3) to guide my development of codes and indexing of textual segments so that they might be analyzed for similarities and differences across interview data. I engaged in the structural coding process by reviewing each transcript by interview questions and their corresponding responses. Once I identified a segment of text with a broad topic, I assigned a structural code and inserted the relevant research question above the text segment (e.g., law as guiding practice, faculty perceptions). For the second iteration, I engaged in constant code comparison (Merriam, 1998) throughout the coding process and refined all structural codes following completion of initial

structural coding. At this stage, I refined and merged a few structural codes. For instance, the structural code “law as hindrance,” which occurred in one transcript, was subsumed under “law as guiding practice” because the text pertained more broadly to the ways in which the participant utilized aspects of the law to guide their practice—particularly in moments where the law was unhelpful in eliminating barriers. The ability to subsume some early structural codes following additional interviews represented refined thinking about the data over time. Further, the refinement of the structural codes served as a step towards achieving data saturation and initial work towards developing the case themes.

As a third iteration of coding, I used In Vivo coding to not only highlight the voices and experiences of participants but to also help me break down and analyze my structural codes to better capture similarities and differences across the data. I completed In Vivo coding using Dedoose, a qualitative coding software package. I imported the structurally coded transcripts into Dedoose, and then completed In Vivo coding for each transcript. All the In Vivo codes were linked to their “parent” structural codes within Dedoose to aid in the analysis and development of the case themes presented in Chapter Four. Appendix C contains a table presenting coding outputs, showing structural codes and sample In Vivo codes.

Using the structural and In Vivo codes, I developed written themes that synthesized these iterations of data analysis and addressed the study research questions. “Themeing the data” is an appropriate strategy for studies that “explore participants’ psychological world beliefs, constructs, identity development, and emotional experiences” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 200). Furthermore, developing themes is a useful strategy for interpreting, summarizing, analyzing, and “reveal[ing] underlying complexities”

across the data (Glesne, 2016, p. 184). Yin (2018) recommended explanation building (i.e., causal sequences that explain the how or why of an outcome) and use of logic models as tactics for addressing the credibility of qualitative research findings. To better explore patterns and relationships between and amongst the data, I also worked with the codes and emerging case themes to develop a figure depicting the ways in which DS directors are embedded within the three nested institutional contexts and, in turn, respond by engaging in specific forms of institutional work (Miles et al., 2019).

Researcher Positionality

As a White woman who identifies as disabled and works in higher education, my identity and collegiate experiences have influenced my research choices and agenda. Throughout my student and professional journey, I have experienced the compound effects of ableism and sexism, fueling my commitment to creating more inclusive campus environments. I also believe that individuals belonging to minoritized communities know when an environment was not created with them in mind. Thus, it is critical to listen to, recognize, and respect those experiences of lack of fit and discrimination. I also believe that research should, in addition to contributing to the larger conversation, contribute to making campus environments more equitable and inclusive.

As a researcher broadly, I approach my research from a disability-informed interpretive framework. A disability-informed approach begins with the belief that disability is socially constructed (Davis, 2013; Dolmage, 2017; Oliver, 2013; Siebers, 2008). Siebers (2008) argued that every space is constructed with a particular social body in mind. Society generally displays a preference for able-bodiedness, and thus typically designs organizations, spaces, and experiences for able-bodied individuals (Dolmage,

2017; Siebers, 2008). When disabled individuals are unable to access a space or engage in the same way as their able-bodied peers, their lived experiences reveal the ableism built into the environment (Siebers, 2008). This perspective informs my qualitative social constructivist approach. At the same time, integrating several approaches for ensuring quality of the research design help me examine and check my positionality throughout the research process.

In summary, the study design and the methods I employed allowed for the four study research questions to be answered. In the following chapter, I present the findings, or case themes, addressing each of the research questions.

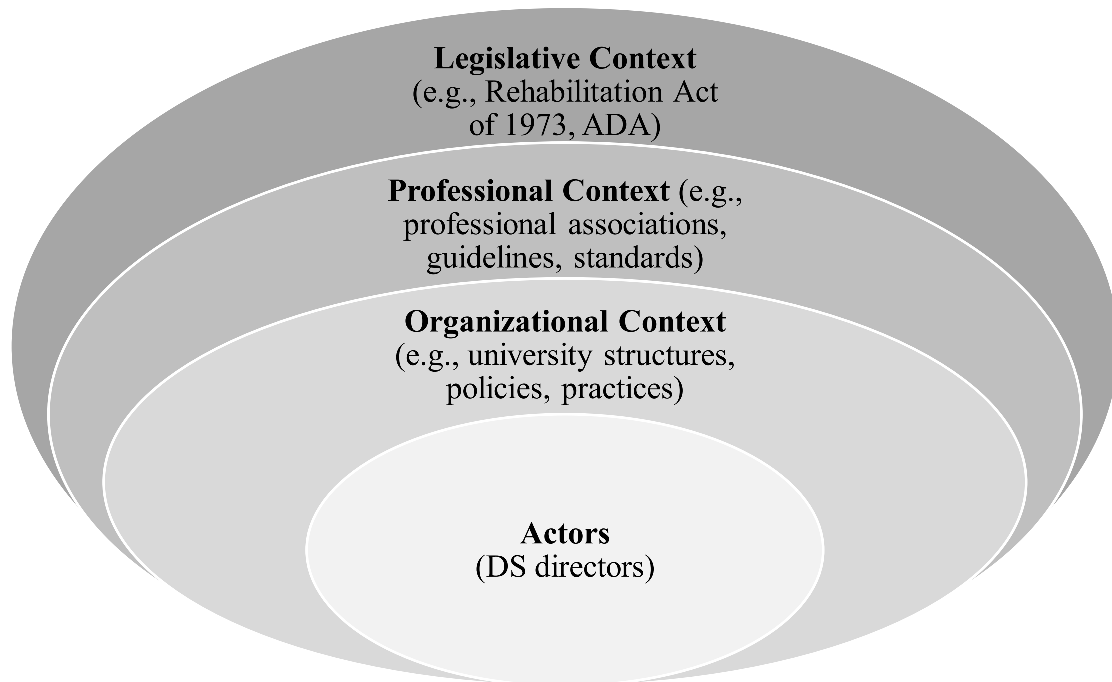
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present findings, or case themes, about how DS directors understood the role of their office within the three interconnected contexts of federal legislation, their organizational setting, and their professional memberships and experiences. I also present findings related to the strategies in which DS directors engaged—as organizational actors—to advance the work of their offices. The themes for this single-case study are based upon qualitative data analysis of case records associated with six DS directors at four-year, public, land-grant universities. Interviews with the six DS directors at these universities served as the primary data source, supported by data from a demographic questionnaire and descriptive analyses of relevant university documents, websites, and policies/handbooks. Neo-institutional theory, and more specifically the study of institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2009), guided the study design and development of case themes. As a reminder, the case themes were informed by the theoretical framework, beginning with themes pertaining to the outermost institutional context (legislation) and zooming inwards to the role of the individual actor (DS directors). This approach to the development and presentation of case themes allowed for exploration of the ways in which DS directors' strategies and practices are informed by and in response to contextual understandings, which is explored in-depth in the Discussion chapter.

The chapter is organized into five sections. I begin by describing group characteristics of participants in the case study and their DS offices. The remainder of the chapter addresses the four study research questions and is structured using the neo-institutional concept of organizational actors embedded within nested contexts (see Figure 1): I begin with the outermost context, the legislative context (research question 1), followed by the professional context (research question 2) and organizational context (research question 3). The chapter concludes by presenting findings related to the institutional work of DS directors (research question 4)—the ways in which they create, maintain, or disrupt the institutions shaping their work.

Figure 1

Diagram of Actors Embedded in Three Nested Contexts



Case Study Participants

The study participants ($n = 6$) all held the title of director of their disability

services office at their respective four-year, public, land-grant university. To provide contextual and descriptive information about the participants, Table 5 presents descriptive statistics for the geographic regions and DS office reporting structures; Table 6 presents descriptive statistics for participant gender and race demographics; and Table 7 presents an overview of participants' higher education work experience, education, and professional memberships. In terms of geographic representativeness, three (50%) of the participants' employing universities were in the midwestern region of the U.S. and three (50%) were in the southeastern region. Although eligible DS directors at universities established by both the 1862 and 1890 Morrill Acts were invited to participate in the study, all six participants worked at universities established under the 1862 Morrill Act. In other words, all the participants worked at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), and there were no Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) represented in the case.

The DS offices represented in the case study featured a variety of reporting structures within their universities and most offices used the term "disability" in their office title. Two of the DS directors indicated that their office reported to the office or division of Student Affairs at their university. The other DS offices reported to Student Life, the Office of the Provost, an Office of Student Success, and a combined Academic Success and Student Affairs unit. The DS offices almost exclusively included the word "disability" in their office title, with five offices using the word "disability" in their title and one using "access." For additional context, Lukas, whose office included the term "access," shared that he wished the office title included "disability." Discussing the change from using "disability" to "access" that occurred about 10 years ago, Lukas

explained that from a practical standpoint, students seeking to register with the office looked for the term "disability," not "access"; at the same time, though,

> There's a little bit of "I wish we hadn't." I think that name is a depart[ure] from, you know, disability. I think it was a way to talk a little bit more with [a] positive connotation, and I wish it was more around identity pride.

Broadly, the other DS directors echoed the practical helpfulness of using the term "disability" as well as use of the term as one way of resisting the representation of disability as negative.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics: DS Office Geographic Region, Reporting Structure, and Title

Item	N	Percent
Geographic Region (U.S.)		
Midwest	3	50%
Southeast	3	50%
DS Office Reporting Structure		
Academic Success and Student Affairs	1	17%
Office of the Provost	1	17%
Office of Student Success	1	17%
Student Affairs	2	33%
Student Life	1	17%
DS Office Title		
Included 'Disability'	5	83%
Included 'Access'	1	17%

Note. Data source: Demographic survey

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics: Participant Gender and Race Demographics

Item	N	Percent
Gender		
Female	3	50%
Male	3	50%
Race		
White, non-Hispanic	5	83%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1	17%

Note. Data source: Demographic survey

The sample was comprised of equal female-identifying participants (*n* = 3) and male-identifying participants (*n* = 3). The sample largely identified as White, non-Hispanic (*n* = 5), with one participant identifying as American Indian/Alaska Native. Participants had held their current roles for a wide range time, spanning from as short as four months to as long as nine years. Similarly, participants held a wide range of experiences working in postsecondary disability services (range = 7–21 years) and higher education more broadly (range = 10–27 years). Examining the differences between years working in higher education and postsecondary disability services, four of the participants had three or fewer years of working in higher education outside of disability services. One participant had 18 years of non-disability services related experience in higher education and another had seven years of higher education experience outside of disability services. All the participants held advanced degrees, with two holding master's degrees, two holding professional degrees, and two holding doctorate degrees. Participants' degrees focused on one of three disciplinary areas: higher education (*n* = 3),

special education (n = 1), or counseling/school psychology (n = 2). All participants reported being AHEAD members, with four participants also reporting participation in their state AHEAD chapter, and one seeking to revive their state chapter. Additionally, two participants reported being members of NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education.

Following this contextual and descriptive information about the participants, I present the themes that emerged through data analysis as they related to each of the study's four research questions.

Table 7

Participants' Higher Education Work Experience, Education, and Professional Memberships

Participant (Pseudonym)	Years in Current Role	Years in Postsecondary Disability Services	Years in Higher Education	Highest Degree Completed	Degree Discipline	Professional Memberships Held
Andrea	4	16.5	16.5	Master's degree	Higher Education	AHEAD*
Cara	4	7	10	Professional degree	Special Education	AHEAD*; NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education
Daniel	3	11	18	Professional degree	School Psychology	AHEAD
Ellie	.33	13	15	Master's degree	Higher Education	AHEAD; NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education; Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE)
Lukas	8	21	23	Doctorate degree	Higher Education	AHEAD*
Pete	9	9	27	Doctorate degree	Educational Psychology	AHEAD*; National Rehabilitation Association

Note. Data sources: Demographic survey and interview data. *Indicates membership in both national and state or regional affiliate.

The Role of Legislation in the Work of a DS Office

The themes in this section address research question one, which was how do DS directors understand the role of their office within the context of federal disability legislation? Three main themes emerged from the data pertaining to the legal compliance function of a DS office, use of legislation to motivate faculty to provide reasonable accommodations, and recognition of legislation as a guiding framework.

"Our bread and butter is making sure that students have access": The Legal Compliance Function of a DS Office

Participants consistently acknowledged that their DS offices served a legal compliance function on their campus, stemming from federal legislation—often referencing the ADA. Andrea, who had been in her current role for four years, succinctly summarized participant comments, stating that "Our bread and butter is making sure that students have access." Lukas, who had spent eight years in his current role, explained

> our main premise is to make sure that students have the accommodations needed to afford access to higher education and to the learning environment and, in many of our cases, housing as well. But it's also not just the educational environment—it isn't just the classroom—but thinking about those experiences outside the classroom as well.

Even though she had been in her current role for about four months, Ellie spoke to the compliance function of her DS office considering more recent legislation. Referencing newer digital accessibility standards, Ellie shared

> I think we spend probably more time talking about section 508 and WCAG [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines] standards and everything around digital

> accessibility, just because that is still some of the newest legislation. Schools are still figuring out what that means…So that's probably the area of legislation that we're pushing the most to IT and everything—we have to meet these standards to ensure that students have access to their education…That's where we're probably talking about our legal compliance more than anything.

Thus, participants broadly recognized and spoke to the legal underpinnings of their DS offices.

Similar to how Ellie spoke to working with campus IT to address legal compliance, each participant spoke to their work as DS director of addressing issues related to complaints, grievances, appeals, or discrimination. For example, Cara, who had been in her role for four years, described her typical meetings:

> my meetings are really based on either 1) grievances and lawsuits…and working with different departments and/or faculty on that, or 2) I am meeting with faculty, parents, [and/or] students with complaints in the office. If there's any problems, any discrimination on disability—kind of having those conversations and navigating that.

All participants described the importance of working with their university legal counsel and ADA coordinators on such issues. For example, Andrea gave the example of changing the university appeals process to include the ADA Coordinator as the appeals decision-maker because they "have a better understanding of access." Similarly, Daniel, who had spent three years in his role, explained, "I work pretty closely with our ADA coordinator when I have questions about moving forward with big things…I've had really excellent access to our legal counsel." Ellie, though newer to her current role,

provided the example of working with her university legal counsel to finalize a remote attendance policy to stave off potential problems: “We had it vetted by legal counsel, we’re not required to do that. However, doing that allowed them to point out some areas like, ‘this language is a little unclear’ or… ‘what are your expectations for this’?” In addition to illuminating the legal compliance function of a DS office, the participants’ responses began to emphasize the critical role of collaboration in the work of DS directors and offices, which is addressed in the section on organizational contexts.

“The law is the ace in my pocket”: Using the Law to Motivate Faculty

Participants consistently described one benefit of having a legal compliance function as their ability to motivate unwilling faculty to provide reasonable accommodations. Lukas described the law as “how we encourage faculty to do what they need to sometimes,” and Andrea described it as “a carrot on a stick.” Similarly, Cara described explaining to some faculty, “once they’re here, it is our job by law to accommodate them.” Daniel, reflecting on changes to practices in his office, stated: “we don’t let faculty act as though they’re the decider in the end. They have a say. But it’s not as if they just say ‘well, I don’t want to do it.’ That’s not the way it goes.” However, participants generally agreed that they did not commonly or frequently need to use this strategy. For instance, Ellie aptly characterized participants’ sentiments:

> I always like to say, the law is the ace in my pocket. It is. There are times—but they’re not frequent—in which I need to pull the law into the conversation of, “this is our legal responsibility, we’re going to do this.” However, because we are developing these relationships, and we’re building so much trust with the instructors, we don’t have to talk about it as much.

Collectively, participants expressed the usefulness of the law "in a pinch," as Andrea stated, while simultaneously acknowledging that such conversations were more the minority than the majority. However, though described as an infrequent approach, the theme of using the law as leverage clearly emerged during analysis of participant responses.

"But really our work is above that": The Law as a Baseline, Guiding Framework

Lastly, participants described the law as a guiding framework for their practice, serving as a baseline for their work. At the same time, though, participants expressed that their work and their role included efforts to move beyond meeting the minimum legal requirements. Lukas, who had worked in postsecondary disability services for 21 years, stated,

> it's [federal disability legislation] a guiding work. Largely we're here thinking more about social justice and thinking about right to access and accessibility and Universal Design[6] for most, but…at the end of the day, meeting the law is our basic need, that's kind of where we start…I'd say that's our baseline. But really our work is above that. When we think about the ADA as amended—in the spirit of the ADA—I think going more towards that, and our campus is accepting of that, 50%.

Supporting their depiction of legislation as a guiding framework, all participants spoke to using legal cases and outcomes to best inform their work and practices. Andrea, who had

[6] Universal Design captures the idea of designing spaces and experiences with diverse users in mind. The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (n.d.) describes Universal Design as "the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability. An environment…should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it. This is not a special requirement, for the benefit of only a minority of the population. It is a fundamental condition of good design."

worked for nearly 17 years in postsecondary disability services, spoke to the importance of guidance from the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) in interpreting unclear law:

> The OCR cases…I think helps us interpret how to understand the ADA and the 504. Because it's not all clearly laid out. And so, I think that helps in informing the actual implementation of it. And you know, I think about the questions that we use when thinking about "is it reasonable to provide flexible attendance or flexible deadlines in the class?" And relying on the OCR cases where OCR has said, "here are the things you should be doing…to kind of walk through, is it reasonable?" We go to that to kind of help in [developing] an understanding.

Daniel, who had worked in postsecondary disability services for 11 years, also spoke to the helpfulness of OCR guidance:

> First of all, the guidance that we've had over time with OCR resolutions, has made it quite clear that, you know, each request needs to be considered on its own, that you don't make decisions based on X disability type gets X things. And so, each one is individually considered. The interactive process needs to be thoughtful.

Participant responses emphasized the thoughtfulness, research, and interpretive work that must go into following and abiding by federal disability legislation, which is more of a framework rather than a clearcut set of rules and practices.

While some participants like Ellie, Andrea, and Daniel provided examples of seeking further clarity or guidance in application of the law, Cara–who had worked in postsecondary disability services for seven years at the same university–further highlighted some of the limiting and advantageous aspects of disability legislation.

Describing issues around fundamental alterations to a curriculum, Cara explained, “I get stuck, and I can have my hands tied.” Cara further elaborated that, at the same time, “what I do love about disability is that it's all gray. And that yes, there may be a lot of no’s but there's a way around it. We try very hard to find a way around it.” Cara went on to describe an example of preparing visually impaired students or students with certain learning disabilities to take the National Nursing Certification Exam, which does not allow exams to be completed by paper and pencil:

> We set them up, and we do that [administer paper and pencil tests]. But then we slowly wean them off the paper/pencil, knowing that we're not setting them up for success to pass their certification exam in the end. So, we will do paper/pencil for their classroom. But we will slowly–as we're getting close to senior year–we will start taking away that paper/pencil so that they can get ready for that certification exam where it's really going to matter because it won't matter if you have a bachelor's in nursing if you can't pass the certification exam.

Conversely, Pete, who had been in his current DS director role for nine years, spoke to the challenges of denying accommodations based on the law:

> And the difficult thing about this is, a lot of times we have to…use the word “no” or “not at this time,” and that is particularly difficult for folks—that's not necessarily why they got into human service[s]. You know, we're one of the few groups on campus that says, “sorry, based on our judgment, you can't have A, B or C that you want or you think you need.” So, just making sure [that] when we make those decisions, that they are consistent with the framework or in the spirit of the ADA and the Rehab[ilitation] Act.

Thus, participant responses illuminated some of the ways in which disability legislation both supported and complicated their work. On one hand, disability legislation provided an interpretable framework that may provide flexibility for DS practitioners; on the other, it required careful review and consideration of additional guidance and strategies to work around limitations of, or even barriers resulting from, the law. Sometimes, though, DS directors are unable to provide certain accommodations under the provisions of the law.

As represented in Lukas' response, participants often discussed the ways in which their DS offices sought to move beyond just meeting the legal minimum. Ellie responded,

> where I actually see our role, if you really get it down to the nuts and bolts of what we do, is to provide access as an institution. So, a lot of what that actually means is making sure that the professors aren't getting sued, is kind of my joke to them sometimes. We're a compliance entity to ensure that we're upholding the law as kind of the baseline of what we do. But then we expand out to that, "what does access mean for every student, faculty, staff, guest?" And so really focusing on that. I spend a lot of time talking about access as a shared responsibility, where it may start with the [DS office]. But it doesn't necessarily—[the DS office] isn't the end all be all. And we have a joint responsibility to create access for anyone that's a part of the [university] community.

Similarly, Andrea spoke to her DS office's work outside of providing accommodations:

> So we do that [ensuring equal access] through, primarily the provision of accommodations, but also providing that consultation with the university community. Really trying to provide education to promote a more proactive method of including our students. My hope is that in the future, we can kind of

> start moving from me saying we're primarily known for a role in accommodation to kind of having that be like the last thing.

Participant responses indicated that, while their office served a legal compliance function, the DS directors saw their roles as much more nuanced and as moving, or starting to move, beyond their legal underpinnings. Participants discussions of Universal Design, shared responsibility for creating access, and educating the campus community point to their dual recognition of their responsibility to uphold the law but also support and improve their campus communities. These responses foreshadow themes addressed in later sections pertaining to the ways in which DS directors understand the role of their office within their campus contexts.

The Role of Professional Memberships and Experiences in the Work of a DS Office

In this section, I address themes pertaining to research question two, which was how do DS directors understand the role of their office within the context of their professional experiences and professional memberships? This section features two main themes. First, participants identified professional memberships as an important resource for helping them engage in best practices. Second, participants described the ways in which their prior professional experiences helped socialize them to and prepare them for work in the field of postsecondary disability services. Given that the literature indicated a lack of standardized training and education among DS professionals, this research question and related findings aimed to provide insights into how DS professionals drew upon established professional guidelines and practices, or field-level institutions, to inform their work.

Professional memberships

One key theme emerged concerning the role of professional memberships in participants' conceptions of their DS role and work. Participants described the ways in which professional organizations–namely AHEAD–provided valuable access to resources, professional development, and peers that helped guide and inform best practice. All the participating DS directors indicated that they were AHEAD members, with Cara, Lukas, Andrea, and Daniel highlighting their current or past leadership roles within AHEAD regional or state affiliates. Daniel also spoke about wanting to start a regional affiliate in the state where he currently works, which was defunct at the time of the interview.

"An opportunity to really encode and learn and engage." Daniel, who had spent about 60% of his higher education career in disability services, broadly summarized participants' comments when speaking about his participation in AHEAD: "I find it really helpful to have those colleagues that I can reach out to." Other participants elaborated more specifically on how they drew upon their engagement with AHEAD and their fellow AHEAD members. Andrea, whose entire higher education career had focused on disability services, described how being involved in the AHEAD conference

> gave me an opportunity to really encode and learn and engage with others about the profession. I've remained a member of AHEAD…I haven't always been able to go to conferences because of budgets. But that is something that I really value in regards to hearing from others and hearing the best practices.

Similarly, Lukas, who had spent over 21 years working in higher education disability services, emphasized the helpfulness of engaging with other professionals through various forms of communication:

> Getting to know folks and leading conversations, but being able to reach out via email using listservs. Going back through a number of historical conversations on our website–it's been really helpful. We also have a couple other listservs we've used in the profession…And kind of hearing the other people's experiences is really helpful. Hearing how we apply policy and make it into protocol, how we work with the law on each campus has been really helpful. It's also nice to have friends to call on when challenges come up to say, "I haven't encountered this, but I know Bob down the road. They've got experiences and let's chat."

Cara, who held memberships in both AHEAD and NASPA, echoed the usefulness of listservs: "I go to them [AHEAD] for everything. We use their listservs if we have a random emotional support animal that's been asked…Has anyone actually ever experienced a tarantula as an emotional support animal? And if so, please help me!" Thus, the DS directors engaged with AHEAD and their fellow AHEAD members in a variety of ways, such as attending the conference, reaching out to colleagues, and reviewing and participating in listservs to learn from others' experiences.

"They provide so much guidance and so much wonderful professional development experience." Ellie and Cara also spoke to the ways they push their staff to get involved with professional organizations to develop and learn within their roles. Cara, an active member in both national AHEAD and her regional affiliate, described the importance of AHEAD in terms of professional development for both her and her staff: "So I pay for memberships for my entire staff to be members of AHEAD. That is a lot of professional development money, but I advocate for it…We use their webinars every single semester, and we all watch them as a team." Ellie, a member of AHEAD, NASPA,

and ASHE at the time of the interview, explained that she encouraged her staff to participate in AHEAD as well as other professional organizations:

> AHEAD is an amazing resource…However, if we really want to talk about creating access, we have to get outside of our disability bubble. And we have to hear from our colleagues in other areas of education, to better be able to understand what role we play in supporting access as a shared responsibility and access from a university wide lens.

Both Cara and Ellie emphasized the importance of developing themselves but also their staff through engagement with professional organizations. Although Ellie was the only DS director to discuss using professional organizations as a means of "getting outside of our disability bubble," other directors expressed similar sentiments when reflecting on the value of their previous professional experiences.

Andrea and Cara also spoke to using certain AHEAD resources to help them in specific circumstances. Andrea, who had recently revised her DS office mission, vision, and values statements explained that

> one of the things that I think also helped in supporting again, our mission and vision and values, was really looking at the new AHEAD professional standards. And saying, "okay, like, where are they going? Where should we be going? Where are we not hitting the mark?" And so definitely kind of doing some comparisons there.

Similarly, Cara shared that "The national organization–I use when I'm in grievances and lawsuits. I ask them for help. And they provide so much guidance and so much wonderful professional development experience." Although the DS directors in the case study

emphasized several ways in which they leveraged professional memberships, taken as a whole, their responses revealed the role that AHEAD plays in guiding and informing their practices. Unlike legislation or codified campus policies and practices, the DS directors described AHEAD resources and peers as important sources of ideas and growth as well as a place to seek and share guidance from experienced professionals.

A sub-theme within the case was the role of a specific informal professional organization. Four participants–Andrea, Cara, Daniel, and Pete–identified as part of an informal professional group based upon their university's athletic conference. Describing the informal professional group, Daniel, a former leader in an AHEAD regional affiliate, shared,

> we meet every two weeks on a Zoom call for those of us that can and want to make the call…And then each year…we get together for two or three days at a different campus, and visit and learn what that campus is doing, but also have face-to-face time with each other. And so that's become a really helpful organization because sometimes when you have a challenging question, it can be difficult to get the question answered adequately just through online resources. And if you can actually pick up the phone and call a friend and talk it over and if you've got ten of those friends at high levels that you can talk with, you don't have to push everything up to, you know, a lawyer to ask them their decision. Because most of the lawyers don't have as much experience in disability work as my colleagues do.

As illustrated in Daniel's response, these participants echoed the broader theme of appreciating having knowledgeable colleagues to turn to with questions and for advice

that can quickly help them solve a problem or improve their practice. However, it is worth recognizing that this informal organization provided an additional layer of support for these four DS directors.

Professional Experiences

A broad theme emerged from the data relating to the role of participants' professional experiences in helping socialize them to work of postsecondary DS offices. Each director shared many examples of the ways in which they drew upon their previous professional experiences to help inform their current work. As illustrated in Table 7, the participants had varied educational backgrounds, leading to a variety of professional experiences. At the same time, their previous professional experiences pertained to the broader fields of education and disability services, which participants described as helping socialize and prepare them to work in the field of postsecondary disability services.

Given that all participants, except for Pete, had worked in postsecondary disability services outside of their current role, most participants referenced or shared vignettes about their prior experiences working in postsecondary disability services. For example, Andrea, who had a degree in higher education, emphasized lessons learned across experiences working exclusively in postsecondary disability services across a few universities. From her undergraduate experience working in a DS office, she was able to "pull in those experiences…seeing how things function, what were things that I liked, what were things that I didn't quite like." When reflecting on her first professional position, Andrea described

> navigating the politics at that institution. It was a smaller institution, less

> resources. So, I had to do more, really kind of navigating the—how to advocate for certain things, how to kind of realize, "hey, this is maybe not going to work here."

Andrea further explained that when stepping into her current role, she had to recognize the need for "an understanding of the culture of the university. And I can't just say that what happened at this one institution is going to be able to be applied everywhere. There's a lot more nuance to that."

Similarly, Ellie, another DS director with a higher education disciplinary background, spoke to her experiences at multiple universities. Ellie explained that her first DS director–whom she worked for as a graduate student–instilled in her that "we have to have a good understanding there [of the legislation and civil rights movements] to be able to think more broadly on what does access look like on our campuses." She described her later roles as challenging her to think more deeply about "preferences versus access barriers," the ways in which a DS office "showcase[es] what's important to us," and work-based educational experiences like "clinical environments and practicums" that "bridg[e] the gap between academics and employment." Although Lukas referenced his prior experiences in disability services, he spoke broadly about lessons learned through holding a variety of roles across universities and units. Like Ellie and Andrea, Lukas also worked in a DS office as a student (graduate) and worked his way through multiple DS roles as well as held a director position at a global campus. Reflecting on these collective experiences, Lukas, who has a doctorate in higher education, explained: "So that was kind of most helpful, working at multiple institutions, multiple departments. I think it's gotten me the experiences [of] looking at things through a different lens in our

work here." These responses highlight participants' consistent emphasis on the ways in which they drew upon their prior experiences to help them determine how to approach their current role. Particularly, participants described how exposure to different universities and different offices helped them consider and approach their work from different perspectives.

DS directors without a higher education disciplinary background similarly highlighted the helpful lens that their prior experiences afforded them. While Cara also highlighted the various positions she held in her DS office over the past seven years, she largely emphasized the ways in which her K-12 and special education background informed her work:

> It's helped me now be a way better higher ed professional, because I have that K-12 experience. I was in public, I was in private, I was an administrator in schools. So, I've been able to take all of those experiences and now be in higher ed and be under different laws and under those different purviews. But I can bring in what I know from K-12. Because I know what these students experienced when they were trying to get accommodations in the K-12 system…And I think it makes parents and faculty and staff appreciate when I'm…talking to them about certain situations.

Like Cara, Daniel explained some of the strengths his background in counseling brings to his understanding of his role:

> Certainly, the counseling background helps tremendously in terms of talking through situations. The whole interactive process that we are guided to do is made much more effective, I think, when somebody has the skills to sit with a wide

range of people and talk effectively with them and draw people out.

Daniel also explained that having a "school psychology background helps me tremendously in understanding documentation...Most of the staff I've hired in the past, whether here or elsewhere, don't have that background. So, the documentation ends up being a bit, like for me, if you were showing me an engineering schema. I would be lost." Similarly, Pete highlighted how his professional background in vocational rehabilitation helped him develop crucial skillsets related to policy interpretation and legal analyses. Pete's knowledge and connections from the vocational rehabilitation realm also helped him develop new external partnerships for his campus DS office. Although the DS directors who participated in this case study lacked a shared disciplinary background and had varied professional experiences, each spoke in-depth about the value of those experiences and the ways in which those professional experiences helped them understand and more easily step into the role of DS director. Participants viewed their professional experiences as providing them helpful lenses, key skillsets, and legitimacy that aided in effectively fulfilling their DS director role.

In summary, the DS directors emphasized the pivotal roles that engagement with professional associations (specifically AHEAD) and professional experiences played in how they understand and approach their roles and the work of their office. Embedded within many of the participants' responses are connections to both the legislative and campus contexts. For instance, participants highlighted the ways in which involvement in AHEAD helped them explore, navigate, or better understand legal issues in their work. Similarly, participants' descriptions of their prior work experiences often emphasized questions raised or lessons learned about working within the guidelines of federal

legislation. At the same time, several participant responses around their professional memberships and experiences began to highlight the idea of differing campus contexts, primarily through recognition that different campuses and different DS offices might be using a range of practices and strategies within their work, and that some practices may not always transfer from one context to the next. The next section explores themes associated with the organizational, or campus, context within the work of DS directors.

The Role of Organizational Context in the Work of a DS Office

The themes in this section address research question three, how do DS directors understand the role of their office within the context of their specific college or university? Four main themes emerged from the data around some of the ways in which institutions, or taken-for-granted rules, practices, and scripts and schemas operated within the organizational context. First, the DS directors viewed supporting, educating, and enhancing their campus as integral to their roles. Second, the DS directors described effective collaboration with others as integral to accomplishing their work. Third, the DS directors indicated that their work included addressing a range of misperceptions within the campus community. Fourth, DS directors highlighted the ways in which the history of their DS office and disability on their campus informed their understanding of campus practices, culture, and possible trajectories. The remainder of this section elaborates more in-depth on each theme.

"This awareness piece": Contributing to Campus

Alongside their compliance function, DS directors described supporting, educating, and enhancing their campus as important roles of their DS offices. As previously discussed in the themes pertaining to the legislative context, DS directors

described the role of their office in terms of both legal compliance and a responsibility to positively contribute to access and equity on their campus. The DS directors consistently discussed their engagement in presentations, consultations, events, and other informal conversations as primary means of supporting, educating, and enhancing their campus. For example, Cara, a proud member of her university's Student Life unit, shared that "what I love is my presentations, and my outreach, and workshops, and anything that I can do to get out there to really spread disability knowledge." Reporting to his university's Student Success Office, Pete similarly explained,

> I see myself as kind of this awareness piece. We spend a lot of time in committee meetings, or faculty meetings, or college meetings...doing reach out and doing a lot of presentations. You're doing a lot of Q & A's—supporting...students and faculty and staff that way.

New director Ellie drew upon an event from the morning of her interview:

> I spent two hours of my morning engaging with newly admitted students here at [university]. And so that opportunity to talk about, what is access? What isn't access? What are some of the key differences between K-12 and higher ed? How does our office support you? How to get connected to our office, what to expect when you're engaging with our office. I think those are really key and valuable ways that we continue to show that we're making a difference.

Andrea, who reports to a Student Affairs unit, summarized broadly that she tries to be "out and about and seen influencing." Thus, the DS directors' responses pointed to their understanding of how their outreach and awareness efforts followed conventional and accepted university practices such as being involved in committees or participating in

campus events.

Participant responses often addressed their work to support their campus community by making improvements to processes and services. For example, Andrea described working to “update our website to help in being transparent and provide clear expectations” which also helps “create some expectations of us.” Student Affairs division member Daniel described that when his office started reaching out to different colleges “to set up liaisons with each of them from our office, [it] was well received.” Reporting to a hybrid Academic Success and Student Affairs unit, Lukas shared that his office was working on a proposal to develop additional training and resources for faculty who want to develop accessible course materials. He explained that many faculty reach out with questions and are supportive of concepts like the Universal Design principles because “they see it as a positive influence on shaping their coursework, so that they can have more effect on educating the student.” Former K-12 teacher Cara referred to a newer “refer a student” form on her office website as “a game changer for advisors and faculty on campus.” Submission of the completely anonymous form resulted in Cara sending an informal email to the referred student inviting them to have a conversation if they are ever interested in learning more about the DS office or accommodations. In summary, the DS directors’ responses indicated their recognition of an expectation that they are actively contributing to campus efforts to educate and support students. In turn, this established and embedded expectation, or institution, structured and shaped several activities and practices within their work and office that moved beyond compliance.

“We can’t do this alone”: Collaborating Across Campus

Given their expected participation in enhancing their campus, the DS directors

described working and collaborating effectively with others across campus as integral to their work. Veteran higher education professional Pete aptly captured participants' descriptions of working with all kinds of individuals and units across campus:

> That's my job—95% of it is relationship management. In a given day, I'm talking to athletics, I'm talking to housing, I'm talking to the Med Center, I'm talking to parking, I'm talking to faculty. I'm doing a training. I'm talking to my staff, trying to get an idea what's going on their caseload—if things are getting ready to blow up. I'm talking to prospective students, prospective parents. There's a lot of stuff. So, I've got to be responsive to all those people. Because, you know, at some point—we joke around—we're everywhere on this campus, right? We're the [university nickname] mist—we're everywhere.

Ellie described her efforts over the past four months to shift conversations with faculty about accommodations from

> this negative, "they don't want to provide access, they don't want to provide accommodations," to this perspective of "they may not understand the accommodation that we're asking them to provide, they may not understand the implementation of it in their course, they don't have the tools or the resources to apply it." And what is our responsibility to be a resource to them to help them provide access to our students? …Just doing something as simple as that—of even how we respond to emails…has made it seem much less punitive and more collaborative.

Similarly, Cara described that one of her key messages to others on campus was "I'll help you. I will never call you out, I will call you in." Andrea pointed to her new office

mission statement, which she had recently revised as part of a larger Student Affairs unit project: “Collaboration is in our mission statement. It is one of our values. I think it really emphasizes that we can't do this alone.”

Participants also described the ways in which their work and collaboration with others were oftentimes built upon positive relationships as well as structured by campus policies and practices—a theme that already began to emerge through participant descriptions of working with their campus ADA coordinators. Lukas, who consistently emphasized the important role of conversations in DS work, described following academic protocol related to fundamental course alterations: “We’ve got a couple policies, as I mentioned, set up specifically to assist students in maybe…modifying program requirements, or at least having a discussion with faculty, if something's a program or a fundamental alteration.” Daniel, discussing various efforts he has made, noted receiving an invitation that he believed his predecessor had never received: “I've been invited to the Associate Dean's Council on multiple occasions and been allowed to present to them on different things that we're doing.” Cara shared how her strong relationships resulted in her inclusion in conversations—even when she was not required to be included:

> “They're able to call on me, and they want me to be a part of that conversation. Whereas the attorneys here could just deal with it on their own, they call me into every single grievance and every single lawsuit…I'm involved in every single conversation. I'm right there with—you know, if the Vice President needs something. People just call me. And that means something that we have this open relationship. And I think that helps really with the navigating of things that aren't

> happening properly in classrooms and things like that. I'm able to just call on the Vice President, "let's have a conversation, let's call on the faculty."

These responses, among others, emphasized that in addition to forging positive relationships, many of the DS directors' interactions were structured in relationship to campus policies and expected, or normative, practices, such as following procedures outlined in academic policies or waiting for an invitation to present at an exclusive meeting. Cara's response featured an explicit acknowledgement that the legal counsel's inclusion of her in those conversations was not required, which was a point of pride for Cara in terms of the relationships she had built. Additional examples pertaining to collaboration and campus policies and practices are explored in the last section of this chapter, which presents themes related to institutional work.

"They think we do everything": Campus Misperceptions

Alongside their discussions of collaboration, DS directors described the ways in which their work frequently involved addressing a range of misperceptions about their office held by the campus community. Although all DS directors described having positive working relationships with their supervisors, all but Lukas described misperceptions they felt were held by other leaders on their campus. For example, Andrea said "I think there's a thought that we are more case managers, or that we are an academic advisor, or kind of a counselor." Echoing Andrea's perception of role confusion by campus leaders, Cara shared,

> They think we do everything—everything with disability. They think if there is anything that is spoken about disability, just call the DRC. That's what you should do…I only handle the purview of students, and academics, and housing

> accommodations for students. Then we have the ADA Coordinator who works with all faculty and staff, then we have our Environmental Health and Safety Office that does all of the building codes and all the physical parts of accessibility on campus. Do we all work together? Yes. Do we all have a [disability-related] committee that is a President's committee that we all chair and are a part of? Absolutely.

Ellie explained that she felt perceptions often depended on “what realm they're [campus leaders] living in.” Regarding Student Affairs, Ellie said “that leadership 99% of the time gets it. The academic leadership, I think that's been an area where we've struggled…We haven't pushed to be a part of those conversations…to be in Dean's meetings or to engage with entire faculty departments. And I've been doing that.” Like Ellie’s efforts to address misperceptions, Pete stated “I've worked extremely hard to educate them [campus leaders] about our services. I think when initially I got here, any problem—any behavior problem—that they couldn't…fit in the mental health box would come to us.” Responses such as these highlighted perhaps the absence of institutions or the existence of competing institutions. In other words, campus leaders’ confusion about the roles of DS directors and their offices might stem from a lack of scripts and schemas that help them make sense of the role of a DS director on a college campus and so instead they rely upon what they know—case managers, academic advisors, etc. Alternatively, drawing upon regulative institutions might lead campus leaders to focus more on compliance.

In terms of faculty misperceptions, DS directors shared that faculty misperceptions often centered around their responsibilities (or lack thereof) for accommodating students and the extent of their control over their curriculum. Andrea

explained that “it starts around the idea of these are ‘your students,’ and I'm using air quotes here, right? You know, faculty who were like, well, this is the accommodation, so you need to do this.” Daniel shared insights from the faculty advisory board he created:

> It's been interesting, listening to them talk about their perceptions…Sometimes they have the perception that everything had to be done through a contract between the student and the faculty and us. And some of them thought that if the student didn't come and talk to them—even if the student submitted their notification of accommodations through our online system…they weren't responsible for administering the accommodations or making sure the conditions were in place.

Lukas shared that he received survey feedback with some “faculty saying we handed out too many accommodations. And some say we're too difficult to get accommodations through.” Cara and Pete shared additional faculty misperceptions rooted in skepticism and deep-seeded disability biases. Cara said that “I think that they think we hand it out like candy.” Cara further explained that some faculty hold the perception that “there's no way there could be this many students on this campus that have disabilities. There's no way this many people got into this university.” While acknowledging that there are many excellent faculty at his university, Pete described that “there are some that come in that…are still kind of in this…evolutionary… weakness, you know, there should be no weakness, and disability is a sign of weakness.” Similar to leader misperceptions, these responses indicated that faculty might draw upon a range of institutions that collide with the work of DS directors. Additionally, some descriptions described faculty as holding misperceptions tied to the broader social construction of disability.

In terms of student perceptions, the DS directors described a common theme of unrealistic expectations among some students. Ellie explained,

> We're seeing a lot more students come in with unrealistic expectations of what access looks like. We're seeing a lot more requests for single room accommodations for disabilities that traditionally wouldn't be eligible for that. ADHD is a common one, because they want to be able to study in a distraction reduced space. It's not what the housing environment is structured for.

Echoing this sentiment, Daniel said "I think some students think we're here to give them a single room in the best halls." Andrea shared that "there are students that we…from our student feedback survey, know that they are wanting to meet with their access advisor more." The differences between the law governing K-12 schools and higher education offer one possible explanation for such perceptions. For instance, Lukas stated that "there's a big transition difference between high school and college anymore, and with some of the accommodations with homework and tests and things that are beyond our scope as reasonable." Against the backdrop of these misperceptions, the DS directors also highlighted the ways in which their students valued their DS office and saw them as more than just a place for accommodations, but a trusted go-to source of help: For instance, Ellie described that many students "see us as the resource of 'I don't know where to go. But I know that the DRC is connected to every office in one way or another.'" Cara similarly shared that "they also perceive us as a place of safety, and home, and how we make a big university feel small. And that if there's any problem that they have, no matter if it's disability or not, they're going to ask their accessibility specialist." As with leader and faculty misperceptions, descriptions of student misperceptions further emphasized

the ways in which competing institutions, or taken-for-granted rules, practices, narratives, etc., complicated the work of DS directors.

"We were the first" / "Not really something to brag about": Campus Disability History

The last theme that emerged from the data pertained to history of disability on DS directors' college campuses. DS directors' responses suggested that the history of disability on their campus and of their DS office was an important context that still shaped the identity and trajectory of their modern-day office. Across the board, the DS directors traced changes in their DS office over time alongside changes and updates in disability legislation. For instance, they discussed how expansion of legislation and recognized disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, ADHD, mental health) has led to growth of their offices in terms of staffing, services, and kinds of accommodations provided. For instance, Daniel said,

> I think since the ADA was passed…there's been an opening up of those people that think about coming to the disability office. And so, our numbers have grown with that. I think now we're seeing a much wider range of the kinds of accommodations that are being provided. It's more than a testing office.

However, within these legislation-driven timelines, the DS directors interspersed details about key campus figures, points of pride, and points of conflict that uniquely shaped their offices.

Most of the DS directors shared a story or narrative about their office that spoke to the ways in which their office followed, or conformed with, legislation, while also pointing to a history of perhaps being ahead of or progressive for their time. Daniel credited a past university president with giving the university "a really early start":

> There was a small number of students with wheelchairs coming to campus. And so, I think the President tasked a staff person here with figuring things out and making sure those students had what they needed to get around campus…So that was an early start in 1978, [which] would have been the first year that the regulations for 504 had been put into place.

Similarly, Lukas described how in the early 2000s his DS office lagged behind in terms of national disability trends: "There was a lot more people with ADHD and mental health diagnoses registered with the offices [on the coasts] than there were here." At the same time, Lukas said,

> I will say that we have the [university] way—kindness and working with others and thinking about how we can help students and using the Rehabilitation Act and using that in the early 80s. Before the ADA, I think we were starting to work with a lot of students with learning disabilities and ADHD as things came up and trying to be as helpful as we could.

Pete shared, "From my understanding, we were the first [disability services] office in the [regional conference]—nobody has challenged that." Describing the history of disability on her campus, Andrea explained that "This was actually one of the things that drew me to come to [the university]. Because [university] has a rich history of being really at least proactive or really thinking about how to incorporate disabled individuals into our community before section 504." Andrea went on to reference a manuscript written by a disabled alumnus in the 1950s describing their experience living in an accessible dorm. Referencing a disability history poster on the wall behind her, Andrea also shared that the university had an organization for students with disabilities in the 1920s. As seen in these

vignettes, the DS directors understood the history of their office within the context of legislation but also within the context of how their university responded to, upheld, and pre- or exceeded that legislation.

While some shared points of pride that spoke to their campuses' commitments to disability access and inclusion, two directors focused more so on past troubles on their campuses that inform the current direction and efforts of their offices. For instance, although Ellie acknowledged a former university dean "who really championed access before ADA legislation," she also explained that

> up until even five or six years ago, people on this campus didn't talk about disability. It was still very stigmatized here. While there's always been support systems for years...I look at other schools…we're a couple years older than the ADA. So that's not really something to brag about. On our end, there's always been people to individually support students. But really COVID kind of shifted the office and shifted the University [to say] "disability is not a dirty word. We can be talking about this, we need to be talking about this," and going beyond just our legal compliance to actually create true access here for all students.

Similarly, Cara shared her office's history of being housed in inaccessible locations:

> Back in the day, it was [not an] accessible office, and there was a staff member who was a wheelchair user, but they just had to figure it out every single day…About 20 years later, we moved on to the Dean of Students Office…which was not accessible either. And we were starting to get more students with physical disabilities and such. So, there was an uprising from students to have the office moved and relocated to a more accessible building. And so that is where we

currently are. We're currently inside a basement of a residence hall.

Although these stories focus more on negative events rather than points of pride, they still serve as important context for where these DS directors' universities perhaps failed to demonstrate a true commitment to access and inclusion for students with disabilities, even after the passage of legislation. For Cara, in example, the history of inaccessible DS offices on her campus served as an important backdrop for building the university's "first ever standalone [DS office] here on campus." Cara shared "we are so proud that we are going to have this space because for so long—and most disability resource centers are tucked away…we are changing that on this campus." Thus, these negative stories, like stories about points of pride, still informed these DS directors understanding of their office within their campus context, but perhaps more so in terms of thinking about how they would like to create change.

Within these four themes, the DS directors' responses illuminated the ways in which taken-for-granted rules, established practices, cultural ways of knowing, and pervasive scripts and schemas within their campus context—forms of institutions—worked to structure and shape their work. DS directors shared examples of the ways in which they were expected to contribute to their universities' mission of educating students outside of just providing accommodations. DS directors described many instances of collaboration, many of which were often structured by rules (e.g., specific policies) or normalized practices (e.g., reporting issues to your supervisor, receiving an invitation to present). The range of misperceptions that DS directors described revealed the competing scripts and schemas about disability and accommodations that compete in each campus environment. DS directors' stories about their DS office history emphasized

the role scripts and schemas about that history played in helping them contextualize changes in their office across time as well as their university's past approaches to disability, which inform their present-day understandings and approaches. In the next and final section of this chapter, I turn to specific strategies DS directors used to create, maintain, or disrupt institutions shaping their work.

DS Director's Strategies for Creating, Maintaining, and Disrupting Institutions

The themes in this section address research question four, what strategies do DS directors utilize to create, maintain, or disrupt institutions shaping their work? This final section is divided into three main themes around the ways in which DS directors described strategies or practices that represented forms of creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions. DS directors most often described strategies aimed at creating new institutions, which included engaging in advocacy, constructing identities, and constructing normative associations and networks. The DS directors also described strategies aimed at maintaining certain institutions, using strategies such as embedding and routinizing, policing, enabling work, and mythologizing. Lastly, the DS directors described a few strategies aimed at disrupting institutions as opposed to creating them or maintaining them. These strategies included undermining assumptions and beliefs, permeating and infiltrating, and maneuvering. The presentation of these themes considers several examples and themes previously presented.

Creating Institutions

Mirroring the general overrepresentation of "creation" institutional work within the literature, DS directors most often described engaging in strategies aimed at creating new institutions. As discussed in the literature review, "creating" institutions is a bit of

misnomer, in that creating institutional work strategies often focus more on shifting or adapting institutional practices, especially at the individual actor level (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). These strategies included advocacy, constructing identities, and constructing normative associations and networks.

Participants' descriptions of advocacy work often surfaced when describing changes they had made to the work of their office and the means by which they accomplished those changes. For instance, Andrea shared,

> we have been able to advocate for additional staff in our office…that includes…one access advisor and a second assistant director position. We have also been able to expand our exam staff by one, and that was actually through a merger. But we're at—right now 13 professional staff. That provides the opportunity to better support students, be more timely, and also trying to hopefully address some staff burnout.

Similarly, Cara, when describing the growth of registered students in her office over the last decade, shared, "we now have 18 full time staff members…So, since becoming director, I've been able to advocate for over six positions. And we've secured permanent funding, nobody's on soft funding, which is huge for us." Lukas, described working with leaders on his campus: "We're really close with our President's office [and] Provost's office. When questions come up, advocating for changes to practices, you know, in regards to digital accessibility [in example]." Daniel provided the example of successfully advocating for a more flexible budget with the Vice President for Finance at his university:

> We're being given a standard budget like offices typically are, and I said that

> doesn't work for the disability office because we can't predict the cost of accommodations that students coming in might need. If students came in needing remote interpreting for ASL that's going to run us—in a typical year—that'll probably run us at $90,000 per student. And if my budget has exactly that amount in it for everything, I obviously can't do the job.

These advocacy efforts often leveraged changes stemming from the evolution of legislation to articulate the need for additional or redistributed resources. Such examples illuminated the ways in which the DS directors engaged in advocacy efforts to change practices and secure resources by demonstrating the ways in which failure to approve their requests will negatively impact operations of the offices.

Constructing identities as a form of institutional work often captured the ways in which institutional actors forge ties to the broader institutional field in which they operate (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). As previously discussed, the DS directors described the important ways in which their professional memberships—mainly AHEAD— and experiences helped socialize them to the profession of postsecondary disability services. At the same time, DS directors described other ways in which they engaged in constructing their identities on campus, most commonly sharing examples of their efforts to clarify "the role and scope of our positions," as Ellie put it. For example, Pete described the benefits of new programs and offices that helped clarify the role of his office—changes that resulted from his advocacy efforts:

> They were things that we were trying to deal with at the [DS office] but weren't really in our wheelhouse and caused a lot of confusion with faculty and staff and students…The development of these new programs [was] very helpful in helping

> them understand, what are the different levels of support and where does the DRC fit.

When describing some students' desire for the DS office to be "more like the Women's Center," Andrea explained that

> we try by having like a little coffee bar, and you know, books and stuff…And I think it goes back to that—we're in different kind of hearts, you know? We're not…one of our social justice units, which are just pure identity centers. But we're not in the Learning Center. And we're in Student Affairs. And so, we're kind of this hodgepodge, while also just needing to make sure that we meet the bottom line of…making sure that students have access, and all these other things are kind of what we can take on as we move forward as we can.

In contrast to institutional work around advocating for resources, the institutional work of constructing identities not only applied to DS Directors' socialization to the profession and field, but also efforts to clarify and adjust the identities of their office by considering where their office falls within the larger university structure and what responsibilities and expectations should be associated with their roles.

In the context of neo-institutional theory, constructing normative associations involves reshaping connections between practices and cultural-cognitive foundations to create a shift or make a change in an organizational context (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Examples of this kind of institutional work can be seen through prior vignettes in which DS directors described their efforts to reframe their work less from a legal perspective, borrowing more from alternative scripts and schemas. Examples included Ellie's descriptions of framing access as a shared responsibility on campus and "really

honing into that land-grant mission…about providing an equitable experience for all students," and Lukas' descriptions of creating trainings around Universal Design that moved faculty beyond the accommodation approach in ways that benefit all students. Cara's story of securing initial funding to build a standalone DS office on her campus also served as an example of constructing normative associations:

> I told a story of one of my students and our connection and what I've done since I've been there. And I said…I am here to say that this is what this university needs and this is why we need it. And then our Dean of Students did the slide about the money and said, "we need $5.2 million today. And then [Cara] will be coming back every year until we have the money, we need to build this building." And they gave me the money on the spot.

These examples emphasized the strategy of shifting or adapting practices by tapping into different cognitive-cultural foundations, or shared beliefs and values, to help reinforce and gain buy in for the shifted or adapted practice or approach.

Strategies around constructing normative networks were largely highlighted through DS directors' descriptions of collaborating with others on campus to accomplish their work. In many of their descriptions of collaboration, DS directors highlighted the ways in which they sought to create or establish norms for how they and others should work together. Daniel, who described faculty misperceptions around their responsibility to provide accommodations, shared his solution:

> And now I'm working [on] creating a video on that issue to make sure that they [faculty] know that as soon as the student submits…their notification, that they are kind of on the hook. And then if they want to talk to us—they need to come

> talk to us, if they have got a question about anything.

Lukas shared the example of attending interviews for new faculty and administrative hires to “open up doors” so that he can later say “hey, you know, I mentioned this question, we talked about accessibility. I want to talk some more. I want to be here as a resource for you.” Similarly, Ellie shared the importance and challenges of informal agreements that help move requests for exceptions to policy along:

> we've had all these conversations, set up these really great resources and relationships. And then if someone leaves, it's back to square one because we can't have that documented that we have these exceptions, because then there's some pieces to that. But it's more of an informal agreement. But then it's always having to go back and be like, well, we need to have this conversation. Again, this is what we've done in the past. This is why we've done it in the past. Here's other schools that have not considered this and they've been sued, and here's been the outcome.

Ellie’s response particularly highlighted the trouble with creating institutions through loose, informal normative networks—if too many people leave the network, the taken-for granted practice supported by the network is revealed and may collapse. Normative networks constructed via formal policies—such as Andrea’s revision to her university’s appeals process to funnel to the ADA coordinator—face less risk in terms of easily falling apart.

Maintaining Institutions

In addition to creating institutions, the DS directors also shared examples of engaging in strategies aimed at maintaining, rather than creating, changing, or disrupting,

institutions. The DS directors' primary strategies for maintaining institutions included embedding and routinizing, policing, enabling work, and mythologizing.

In contrast to descriptions of creating new policies and practices, DS directors described engaging in embedding and routinizing activities largely though their commitment to upholding their core purpose: meeting the federally mandated requirement to provide access. The most prevalent examples of embedding and routinizing were DS directors' descriptions of relying upon OCR cases and guidance to best shape their practices so that they can avoid lawsuits or other sanctions. In addition to the previously provided examples, Pete described one of his primary responsibilities as DS director as "keep[ing] staff trained, and updated on...some of the legal issues or...OCR findings, and then also any changes in the national landscape." Routinely infusing OCR guidance into their daily work and practices served as a method of maintaining, or upholding, the institution of compliance. One other consistent embedding and routinizing strategy emerged among DS director responses, which was their efforts to keep their supervisors and leaders in the loop about their work. For example, Daniel said that

> I try to always keep my boss in the loop about anything that I see as a potential issue or problem. I don't ever want him surprised. Because if he's surprised, or the Vice President's surprised, it is going to hurt me, and so even if I have to tell him something that I did that was a mistake, I'd rather it come first from me.

Similarly, Cara shared the example of setting the expectation with her supervisor that the DS office shuts down and focuses on only proctoring tests during final exams: "The Vice President knows I'm not going to be at the divisional directors' meetings. I'm not going to

be able to be a part of anything, and neither will my staff.” Thus, DS directors’ responses illustrated the ways in which they upheld normative institutional hierarchies in terms of reporting structures but that these efforts also tied back to upholding their compliance function, too.

Along the same lines, DS directors described only one way in which they engaged in policing behaviors to ensure compliance, which was using the threat of potential legal action to motivate faculty to provide accommodations protected by federal legislation. Participants descriptions of the law as “how we encourage faculty” and “the ace in my pocket” among others within the legislative context section illustrated this form of institutional work. At the same time, participant responses also indicated deliberate avoidance of certain institutional work strategies, such as demonizing, or public shaming. Instead, they preferred strategies that might be considered enabling work—rules or approaches that supplement and support institutions. As discussed previously, the DS directors articulated their preference for using welcoming rhetoric and inclusive approaches to accomplish their work, as opposed to attacking certain beliefs (demonizing). Illustrations of welcoming rhetoric included Ellie’s attempts to make interactions with faculty “less punitive” and Cara’s promise to “never call you out.” Additionally, DS directors referred to specific practices such as working with a faculty advisory board; participating in campus working groups, committees, and the faculty senate; presenting at department/unit meetings and campus events, as their preferred approaches to advancing access on their campuses.

Other forms of enabling work included DS directors’ descriptions of the ways in which they supported their staff and faculty—whether through training, conversations, or

documentation—to complete their work and meet expectations for providing access. For example, Daniel explained that, based upon OCR guidance, “one thing that I've tried to do with our staff is to make sure that they understand...how they're making their decisions...The interactive process needs to be thoughtful. I've shared with our staff that they don't ever make a decision without the student's direct involvement.” Both Andrea and Ellie shared concrete examples of supporting sound decision making by their staff, too. Andrea shared that she and her access advisors have standing weekly meetings dedicated to “trying to make sure that we're being consistent in our decision making” in regard to routinely challenging accommodations such as requests for flexible attendance. Ellie shared that following an internal audit, her office had begun auditing staff notes and “creating rubrics” to better guide what should be included in those notes pertaining to how an accommodation decision was made. She explained that “for me, as a new director, I've really pushed the staff—going back to that concept of, we need to be able to defend our ‘Yes,’ just as much as we defend our ‘No.’” Lukas shared his strategy of “keep[ing] an eye on the faculty senate and on new programs that come out” so that his office could

> try to keep abreast [in terms of] who the people are connected to those programs, talking with them ahead of time before any students have enrolled, so [that] we know a little bit more about their curriculum and their expectations; looking at their technical standards to know what requirements are going to be available to students, making sure that isn't kind of unfair towards, you know, ableism and disability.

Such examples represent instances in which the DS directors implemented practices or

approaches aimed at maintaining institutions—predominantly the expectation to ensure equitable access. In contrast to engaging in institutional work aimed at creating new institutions, these strategies, although they may involve new practices or approaches, worked more so to bolster existing norms, expectations, and understandings rather than shift them or create new ones.

Lastly, the DS directors' responses demonstrated engagement in mythologizing, which is a form of institutional work that involves drawing upon the past to reinforce institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Use of mythologizing was exclusively demonstrated when talking about the history of their office and of disability on their campus. References to key figures, points of pride such as being "early" conformers to disability legislation, and narratives of living up to their universities' missions all functioned as myths that support and legitimate their offices' and universities' commitments to providing access. Even the negative stories served to create a powerful myth—that the university had a demonstrated track record of falling short in providing access—that can then be leveraged as a means of creating change, such as in the example of Cara securing funding for a standalone DS office.

Disrupting Institutions

Finally, DS directors shared examples illustrating a few strategies in which they engaged to disrupt institutions, rather than maintain them. In comparison, fewer strategies for disrupting institutions have been identified in literature on institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The DS directors' disruptive institutional work included undermining assumptions and beliefs, permeating and infiltrating, and maneuvering. Undermining assumptions and beliefs was a strategy previously identified within the

literature on institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), whereas permeating and infiltrating and maneuvering were two disruptive strategies that emerged inductively from the data.

DS directors' engagement in efforts to undermine assumptions and beliefs often surfaced in their descriptions of strategizing how to measure success. For example, Pete—who had recently dealt with faculty complaints about alterations to their curriculum and a lack of transparency—shared the role data played in helping him educate and justify aspects of the DS office:

> That let me start educating people. When we had a pre-COVID spike in the number of students—I mean, it was easy to see, because it was all mental health. Everything's kind of tracking this way, except mental health. We had the data to justify everything and really explain our programs that we've never been able to [explain] in the past. So that collection of data has been very, very, very beneficial to getting us resources that we need.

In this example, being able to share data showing the numbers of registered students and the kinds of disabilities represented helped undermine assumptions and beliefs that the DS office might not need certain resources. Through data collection, Andrea sought to address assumptions that a decrease in students requesting accommodations is a negative indicator about a DS office: "so this semester, we are doing what we're calling a non-user survey, and we are surveying the students who haven't requested their accommodation letters to find out why. So that way, we can also kind of say, 'hey, this is actually a good thing.'" Ellie explained her deliberate choice not to focus on graduation and retention metrics:

> I know that some offices focus on retention and graduation outcomes and everything. But I think there's so many other nuances to that. Not every student that engages with our office, graduation is their end goal...So, saying it's all about retention or all about graduation rates, I think really reduces the individualized piece that we need to be focusing on with our students.

Thus, DS directors' responses illuminated their institutional work of carefully considering the ways in which data could be used to tell stories that undermined existing assumptions or beliefs about the work of a DS office or the results that a DS office should be producing.

I use the terms "permeating and infiltrating" to capture the DS directors' descriptions of their work to be involved, visible, and present across campus. Although the discussion of advocacy and constructing normative networks as creative institutional work spoke to DS directors' efforts to raise awareness and collaborate, the concept of permeating and infiltrating captures another idea: that DS directors are engaging in deliberate strategies that combat the expectation or assumption that DS directors or the DS office are excluded from typical aspects of campus life and events. For example, when describing the history of her DS office, Cara shared that in 2018, "we started for the first time ever being allowed to do presentations at the preview orientation. That was huge for the history of our office because that was a game changer." Daniel recounted his revamping of a students with disabilities advisory council to the President, that formerly had no disabled student members: "So now there is a committee of students that provides an advisory report to the Vice President." Lukas shared, "I think that's one of the best things we can do: Having cheerleaders around campus is ideal, because you want to have

an influence on new programs, new projects, new events, and making sure folks are thinking about accessibility." As a final example, Andrea explained,

> Again, it's relationship building...it's looking at, who are the people that you know in a department...And leveraging the people around the leadership table and Vice Chancellor suite as well...Again, always being present, being trustworthy, so that way they speak well of you and help you in making those connections as well.

Thus, such examples illustrated the ways in which DS directors not only sough to create or shift institutions through advocacy and networking but also disrupt existing exclusionary norms and practices.

I use the term "maneuvering" to capture DS directors' descriptions of navigating exceptions to policies and practices, a form of institutional work rooted in circumventing normative approaches to upholding institutions. Participant descriptions of engaging in maneuvering forms of institutional work can be described along a continuum of approaches. On one end, most DS directors described working with a more powerful or authoritative individual or superseding office to work through typically tough accommodations or exceptions. For example, Daniel described working with his Vice Provost on exceptions to graduation requirements:

> He gets that there's occasionally a need to make some adjustment in some cases. We both support the idea that we shouldn't lower the standards for students. But on the same token…this campus requires a math requirement that is more stringent than I think a lot of campuses are. And so, he will work with me on certain student situations—when the documentation is quite clear that the student really is going to have a struggle meeting that graduation requirement but can

> meet every other requirement to graduate basically. And so, sometimes he'll find a way around, if the student's not majoring in something that requires a high-level math.

Moving more towards the middle of the continuum, Lukas explained how the socioeconomic context surrounding his campus led to a broader approach when considering the amount of documentation needed:

> We're looking, you know, when it comes to documentation, a little bit more liberally [at] what [are] our students' experiences on [a] college campus, what's the other information we gather. We are led largely by documentation for a number of disabilities in order to guide accommodations, but we've tried to think about ways to help students as well. We're not just going to say you have to have documentation for everything, that we're going to ask for a significant amount of documentation. We're going to be a little bit more reasonable about what's ascertainable by the student, as well as what resources are available where a lot of our students live. We're in a state that has a large rural component. And we know a lot of our students don't have access to the health care resources that students in the [state] city area do. And so, we're going to think a little bit about that when we ask for documentation or guide them on their steps towards getting accommodations.

And on the other end of the continuum, Andrea and Cara described engaging in practices that involved (re)interpreting guidelines and policies to be more consistent with modern day approaches and practices. For example, Andrea shared,

> I am going to be really transparent…It's a little frustrating that it [a policy

> document] dictates that we have to get medical documentation. So, we have taken a liberal approach to that actually. So, there's some things that I'm like, I don't think that's best practice anymore. And we've kind of maybe not quite followed exactly how the initial people who wrote that probably were thinking, but I think that's a reflection also of the times.

These examples illustrated the theme of DS directors engaging in disruptive practices that allowed them to maneuver around policies and practices impeding their work. While their degree of maneuvering differed, directors described "finding a way around" and moving through policies and practices that prevented appropriate provision of accommodations within their professional judgement.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented findings from a case study of DS directors (*n* = 6) at public, four-year, land-grant universities. I examined how DS directors relied upon the interrelated contexts of federal disability legislation, professional memberships and experiences, and their campus to understand the role of their DS office. The findings suggest that, while DS directors drew specific understandings from each context, they relied upon the combination of all three contexts to fully understand the role of their DS office. Drawing upon DS directors' descriptions of how they understand the role of their office within these contexts, I then examined the different ways in which DS directors engaged in institutional work strategies aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting the institutions—or taken-for-granted rules, practices, scripts, and schemas—that simultaneously constrained and empowered them as institutional actors. The study findings indicated that DS directors' institutional work strategies tied back to their

contextualized understandings of their roles. In other words, DS directors engaged in institutional work strategies that aligned with what they understood to be their role and purpose on their college campuses. In the following chapter, I discuss these findings in relation to the literature on postsecondary disability services and the neo-institutional theoretical framework.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This qualitative single case study had two purposes: First, this study aimed to examine how DS directors understood the role of their office within the three interconnected contexts of federal legislation, their organizational setting, and their professional memberships and experiences. Second, this study sought to describe the strategies in which DS directors engaged—as organizational actors—to advance the work of their offices, keeping in mind how these contexts informed the DS directors' understanding of acceptable approaches to their work. In this chapter, I discuss the case themes, or findings, in relationship to the literature on disability services and the theoretical framework of neo-institutional theory. In the sections that follow, I discuss how the study answered the four research questions:

1. How do DS directors understand the role of their office within the context of federal disability legislation?
2. How do DS directors understand the role of their office within the context of their professional experiences and professional memberships?
3. How do DS directors understand the role of their office within the context of their specific college or university?
4. What strategies do DS directors utilize to create, maintain, or disrupt institutions shaping their work?

Three Nested Contexts

Findings from the study indicated that the DS directors drew upon several institutions across the three, nested institutional contexts (i.e., legislative, professional, organizational) upon which this study focused. By attending to the nested nature of these three contexts in which the DS directors were embedded, the study demonstrated the ways in which the DS directors relied upon a combination of institutions to understand their role and the role of their DS office. As illustrated in the findings, the DS directors' descriptions and examples highlighted the ways in which the combination of these institutions helped them form a more complete and nuanced understanding of their office's role.

The Role of a DS Office within the Context of Disability Legislation

From the data, three main themes emerged pertaining to the ways in which DS directors understood the role of their office within the context of federal legislation. First, DS directors described the legal compliance function of their DS office. Second, they described how the threat of possible legal repercussions was a helpful motivation tool for faculty who did not want to provide reasonable accommodations. Third, they described legislation as a guiding framework for their work. Broadly, the study findings aligned with literature on the evolution of federal disability legislation within the context of higher education. Participant responses indicated that, ultimately, a core purpose of their offices was to provide equal access for college students with disabilities. At the same time, their responses highlighted many ways in which their work centered around providing access in ways that were more fitting according to modern legislation and thinking about access. The DS directors spoke to the rise in certain disabilities and

accommodations (e.g., mental health, flexible attendance), supporting disabled students' experiences outside of the classroom, trends in requests for housing accommodations, policies on digital accessibility and emotional support animals, among other examples. Thus, the legal compliance function of their office had even shifted over time as legislation worked to keep up with the growing complexities of modern society.

The option to leverage the legal compliance function of their DS office helped the DS directors address issues related to faculty members who did not want to provide reasonable accommodations. Though this strategy was not their preferred or "go to" method of interaction, the DS directors each pointed to this helpful aspect of their legislative underpinning. Experiences with leveraging the law are likely more salient for DS directors due to the nature of their work; though their responses suggested that more faculty are seeking proactive strategies for including students with disabilities, the DS directors' interactions with faculty still seemed to be largely driven by accommodation requests, as might be expected based upon the literature. This finding around the intermittent need for DS directors to leverage the law aligned with study findings suggesting that many faculty are still less than willing to accommodate students with disabilities (Cho et al., 2021; Gilson et al., 2020).

At the same time, the DS directors described legislation as more of a guiding framework, or baseline, rather than a totalizing institution; legislation represented more of a starting point rather than an ending point. The DS directors described the ways in which other sources, such as OCR guidance, helped them understand unclear aspects of the law and uphold legislation to the best of their ability. This theme illustrated that the work of DS directors and their offices required a deep knowledge of how to apply the law

to implement it in their work as well as provide crucial guidance on campus. This theme supported the idea that legislation alone cannot guide DS directors' practices, serving as more of a mandate for access for individuals that meet the legal definition of disability and a prohibition of discrimination. This theme also captured DS directors' sentiments that a DS office is not the only office or entity responsible for access on a college campus. Although they viewed their DS offices as serving a legal compliance function rooted in legislation, that compliance function did not absolve others on campus from ignoring their responsibilities related to access and inclusion for students with disabilities. Although this same belief has been expressed by disability scholars and advocates (e.g., Cory, 2011; Evans et al., 2017; Madaus, 2011), the present study illustrated DS directors' work to spread this message on their campuses.

The Role of a DS Office within the Context of Professional Memberships and Experiences

Scholars identified a lack of a standardized and specialized training or education among postsecondary DS professionals as a potential issue that might lead to or explain variability in their professional judgement regarding accommodation decisions (e.g., Banerjee et al., 2015; Guzman & Balcazar, 2010). The present study findings emphasized the role of AHEAD as an important source of professional networking and learning for DS directors that contributed to how they understood the role of their offices. Participants highlighted their use of AHEAD as a key source of professional development for themselves, with a few highlighting professional development for their staff. The DS directors described leveraging AHEAD networks to help them consider how they might address new and unfamiliar problems of practice. Additionally, a subset of four directors

participated in an informal, regional coalition of DS directors that further enhanced and supported their work. Although the DS directors who participated in the study came to work in postsecondary DS offices through different avenues, each director spoke to the ways in which their prior professional experiences helped socialize them to the work of a DS office and director in some capacity. Regardless of their backgrounds, the DS directors demonstrated an awareness of a constant need to engage with others in their profession to stay on top of best practices and gain new ideas and insights.

Thus, rather than illuminating any issues that stem from DS directors' varied backgrounds, these study findings emphasized the value added by professional associations and networking. DS directors drew upon field-level institutions stemming from professional associations and professional networks to inform and guide their day-to-day work and practices. Considering neo-institutional theory then, participants responses can be interpreted as indicating some degree of normative isomorphic tendencies (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983); in other words, participants indicated a desire to be aligned with others in their profession through use of "best practices." At the same time, participant responses implied thoughtfulness about how they might implement their learning and ideas from AHEAD. Participants never described wholesale copying or adopting of a particular practice or approach. Rather their responses indicated careful listening, conversation, and consideration about what practices, or what elements of an idea, might best meet their needs and inform their work. In other words, they considered appropriate ways to adapt a practice for their organizational context.

The Role of a DS Office within the Campus Context

Examination of the organizational context resulted in several findings pertaining

to how DS directors understood the role of their office in light of institutions operating on their campuses. First, the DS directors viewed supporting, educating, and enhancing their campus as integral to their roles. Second, the DS directors pointed to effective collaboration with others on campus as crucial for accomplishing their work. These findings illustrated a campus expectation or norm that the DS office is involved in and contributing to campus life and operations. As opposed to sitting in an office waiting for a request for an accommodation letter or waiting for an access issue or a lawsuit to arise, the DS directors' descriptions painted a vibrant picture in which their DS offices were connected and engaged with other units and individuals across campus in the work of creating access for college students with disabilities. Along the same lines, the DS directors' engagement and collaboration with others were often guided or at least contextualized by expected practices or formal policies on their campuses. In other words, DS directors described collaborative instances in which they were expected to keep their supervisor in the loop or processes in which they or others were expected but not required to be involved. They also described instances, commonly the appeals process, in which university policy outlined the ways in which they should work with others on campus.

These findings challenged and extended the current literature on postsecondary disability services, which offered few insights into the work of DS professionals outside of providing accommodations to students. Whereas previous studies depicted DS professionals and offices as perhaps not engaged in much awareness or advocacy work or work amongst the campus community (Harbour, 2010; Madaus, 1996), the present study findings indicated that the DS directors' work extended far beyond the provision of

accommodations. The DS directors spoke to giving presentations, making process improvements to address campus needs, following campus policies and practices, collaborating with other units to provide new or expanded resources and services (e.g., Universal Design), among other activities. One explanation for this discrepancy might realistically be the present study's focus on solely DS directors. As the leaders of DS offices, engagement in such activities might be reserved exclusively for directors and perhaps assistant directors whose roles may have more of an expectation to represent their office across campus.

As a third theme, DS directors indicated that their work included addressing a range of misperceptions within the campus community. This finding was in part consistent with the literature on campus climate for disability and the continued prevalence of disability stigma and biases (e.g., Cho et al., 2021; Gilson et al., 2020), illustrated by descriptions of faculty misperceptions and statements like "disability isn't a dirty word." However, the study findings also revealed the prevalence of confusion by some parties around what a DS office really does. For instance, DS directors' descriptions of student misperceptions in some ways complicated prior study findings around student dissatisfaction with DS offices. For instance, student reports of feeling that the DS office failed to serve them well or advocate for them (Fleming et al., 2017; Herbert et al., 2020; Mamboleo et al., 2020) may stem from fundamental student misunderstandings about the disability legislation governing higher education and the role of a postsecondary DS office that need to be addressed by DS directors on their campuses. In terms of campus leaders and faculty, some interpreted the title of "disability services office" to mean that anything pertaining to disability was solely the

responsibility of the staff in these offices. Thus, the prevalence of such a range of misperceptions pointed to the ways in which competing institutions shaped the work of DS directors and their offices. The DS directors had to routinely dedicate time to clarifying the role and scope of their office. Along these same lines, the routine collision of institutions, or competition among expected norms and practices, may point to the general lack of established norms around what a DS office does on a college campus. In other words, this finding suggests that the structures, services, and practices of these DS offices had not yet reached taken-for-granted status, a status characterized by unrealized and unquestioned adherence to organizational norms and practices (Scott, 2013).

The theme around the importance of disability history and the history of the DS office on their campuses may shed additional light on DS directors' struggles related to achieving taken-for-granted status for their offices. The study findings related to this theme emphasized that the trajectory and growth of their DS offices typically followed changes in disability legislation over time. At the same time, DS directors' stories about their DS office histories and past campus disability champions emphasized the role scripts and schemas played in helping them contextualize changes in their office as well as their university's past approaches to disability. These stories helped DS directors ground their work in a broader campus commitment outside of legislation to access and inclusion for disabled students. For those who viewed their campuses as having lackluster track records, these narratives helped them make the case for doing better. The general trend of DS office growth and expansion described by the DS directors may in part explain why the scope and role of DS offices appear to be somewhat contested or misunderstood, depending on the party. Thus, the institutional work in which DS

directors engaged may be largely necessitated by the evolution of DS offices in response to changes in legislation, which reflected broader changes in societal understandings of and perceptions about disability.

Intersecting Contexts

Before turning to the final research question, I consider the interplay across these three nested contexts of legislation, professional fields, and organizational contexts. Taken together, the findings illustrated that DS directors are in some ways hovering in two worlds. On one hand, they are embedded in a legal context concerned with compliance and avoidance of sanctions; on the other, they are embedded in a postsecondary learning environment concerned with learning outcomes, student success, retention, persistence, access, and inclusion, among other higher education terms. Although the law provides a guiding framework and leverage for meeting their compliance obligation, DS directors must engage in deliberate work for their DS offices to be seen as more than just a compliance entity and as the only unit responsible for ensuring access. In terms of professional organizations, AHEAD served as important mediator or bridge between the legislative and organizational contexts for DS directors. Engagement with AHEAD and informal professional groups provided DS directors practical guidance for their work that they would not find in legislation or within their existing campus policies or procedures.

Changes in the law and legislative context have led to changes in the structures and work of DS offices—"It's more than a testing office," as Daniel said. The DS directors' descriptions perhaps illuminated a more modern understanding of their DS offices as both a compliance entity as well as an important campus support and resource

for more than just students. The DS directors highlighted their work to support campus faculty, staff, and leaders in terms of providing access and addressing concerns. Although engagement with AHEAD informed their practices, the DS directors consistently referenced their campus cultures, norms, policies, and practices in relationship to their work and choices. DS directors' responses around complications and misperceptions in their work indicated the existence of several colliding institutions about disability and the work of postsecondary disability services. These colliding institutions stemmed from several areas of the institutional environment: compliance myths, societal-level stigmas and biases, norms from other organizational contexts (e.g., high school, other campus units), among others. In summary, considering these nested contexts holistically emphasized that no single context could account for the work of a DS office on a college campus. Furthermore, DS directors faced the difficult task of drawing upon these different contexts to fully conceptualize the role of their office and make decisions about what actions to take and in which strategies to engage.

The Institutional Work of DS Directors

In this section, I address the fourth and final research question pertaining to the strategies in which DS directors engaged to create, maintain, and disrupt institutions that shaped their work.

Actor-Level Institutional Work Strategies

The study findings related to the forms of institutional work in which DS directors engaged shed light on several strategies used at the individual actor level, as opposed to strategies used by organizations or field-level actors (e.g., professional associations) or state- or government-level actors. Thus, these findings contributed to addressing a gap in

the literature on the ways in which individual actors, who are simultaneously constrained and empowered by institutions, engaged in various forms of institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2009). Actors' practices are integral to institutions, even at the individual level. Institutions are upheld by actors engaging in practices and activities that sustain them; institutions die out without anyone to enact or enforce them (Lawrence et al., 2009).

The study findings suggested that DS directors engaged in several strategies aimed at creating institutions, which at the actor level typically means more shifting and adapting institutions rather than creating brand new ones. DS directors' creation-focused institutional work centered around advocacy, constructing identities, and constructing normative associations and networks. Drawing upon the previous discussion, these strategies aimed at creating institutions can be interpreted as, at least in part, a function of or response to the evolution of postsecondary disabilities services sparked by changing legislation and increasing numbers of disabled students accessing and attending postsecondary education. Further, changes within the field of higher education such as the expansion of identity-based and student-success-focused centers and initiatives may have contributed to this evolution, added to the confusion, or provided templates for DS directors and their offices. DS directors' institutional creation strategies centered around shifting or adapting practices in ways that helped their offices meet present-day demands: advocating for new resources given significant increases student registrations, clarifying the scope and purpose of their office given their compliance purpose and in relation to their campus context, leveraging organizational identities and scripts to reshape practices, and establishing new norms for inter-organizational collaborations and partnerships. Engagement in such institutional creation strategies required DS directors to leverage

their knowledge across the legislative and organizational contexts to select strategies and approaches that would be successful on their campus.

The study findings also indicated that DS directors engaged in several strategies for maintaining institutions, largely aimed at upholding the compliance function of a DS office. These strategies included embedding and routinizing, policing, enabling work, and mythologizing. At the heart of these strategies is a desire to fulfill their DS offices' compliance function directly or indirectly. For instance, embedding routine review of OCR guidance into their daily work; addressing and correcting refusal to provide accommodations; and engaging in practices like regular staff training and process improvements directly support DS directors' efforts to uphold legislation. Practices such as keeping stakeholders in the loop about potential problems and preserving a campus' disability history work to uphold organizational norms in ways that, again, support fulfillment of providing equal access for college students with disabilities. At the same time, there was one specific behavior that DS directors explicitly avoided: demonizing. When discussing instances of policing, or using law to motivate faculty to provide accommodations, the DS directors discussed their preference to avoid such strategies and shared other anecdotes emphasizing their efforts to make people comfortable talking about disability rather than alienate them. Instead, they preferred more collaborative strategies that fell under creation work (as discussed above) or enabling work, rules and practices that facilitate the upholding of institutions (e.g., streamlining appointment notes, regular staff meetings). This finding was particularly interesting given the prevalence of sanctions and punishments in institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Lastly, the study findings indicated a few ways in which DS directors engaged in

strategies that disrupted institutions, which included undermining assumptions and beliefs, permeating and infiltrating, and maneuvering. Forms of institutional work that are aimed at disruption are generally underrepresented within the literature on institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Thus, the present study findings contributed to the study of institutional work by offering descriptions of two new forms of institutional work. Unlike their efforts to create and maintain institutions, DS directors' disruption efforts were largely aimed at countering institutional norms and myths that detracted from their ability to fulfill their purpose or represented a barrier to their inclusion on campus.

In terms of conceptualizing what success looks like for their office, DS directors worked to undermine potentially harmful assumptions and beliefs that might detract from the support they receive or challenge the office identity they have worked to construct. In terms of their collaboration efforts, DS directors worked to have a felt presence by permeating and infiltrating campus groups and events as appropriate. Although collaboration efforts were addressed under creation forms of institutional work, the permeating and infiltrating disruption strategy emphasizes the ways in which DS directors deliberately asked for and took advantage of opportunities to insert themselves into campus spaces and groups where they previously had not been involved. This finding illustrates a common trend in the study of institutional work where creation and disruption strategies often represent two sides of the same coin (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Lastly, DS directors also variably engaged in a disruption strategy that I have termed maneuvering. This term recognized DS directors' efforts to work around policies in ways that are still appropriate and institutionally acceptable. Accommodations, by

nature, are exceptions to the rules. However, participant descriptions of the ways in which they navigated getting exceptions to stringent policies approved (e.g., graduation requirements) or interpreting policies within the spirt of more modern law revealed the skillful ways in which DS directors disrupted established rules and practices to fulfill their goal of providing equal access to students.

Relational Forms of Institutional Work

Focusing on the ways in which an actor creates, maintains, or disrupts institutions foregrounds the intended outcome of the action rather than other aspects, such as the means or how behind accomplishing institutional work (Hampel et al., 2017). Examining the institutional work of the DS directors all together, their strategies can be largely characterized as highly relational forms of institutional work (Hampel et al., 2017). In other words, most of their institutional work inherently involved influencing or working with others in some capacity. For instance, strategies such as constructing identities, advocacy, constructing normative associations and networks, enabling work, policing, and permeating and infiltrating explicitly involved using interactions with others to influence or uphold institutions. Institutional scholars have posited that the institutional work strategies used by actors reflect their skillsets and agency (Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), for example, explained that actors working outside of normative boundaries likely possess a higher degree of cultural competence, whereas those who undermine beliefs and assumptions are likely more comfortable with innovation, originality, and subversion. The DS directors' responses generally demonstrated high attention to aligning with campus norms and culture. Comfort with innovation and subversion might explain the variability within DS

directors' maneuvering strategies. While all worked within the limits of law and policy, some DS directors were more comfortable than others with re-interpreting policies and practices in less conventional ways.

Study Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. Study sample size (*n* = 6) and representativeness might be considered limitations of the study. Six DS directors from public, four-year, land-grant colleges and universities participated in the study (approximately 13% of eligible participants, *n* = 48), all of whom were employed at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) established under the 1862 Morrill Act. While six study participants may seem rather small, all participants comprised a single "case" rather than multiple cases. The single-case design means that all participants and their DS offices were considered as a single group to develop themes and findings about DS directors at public, four-year, land-grant universities. The goal of the case study was not to generate broadly generalizable findings; the study aimed to develop case themes that captured the ongoing processes and practices of institutional work as the study participants described them. However, because the study participants were all employed at PWIs, it is important to recognize that the study findings may not represent the experiences, understandings, and institutional work strategies of DS directors at HBCUs. Just over half of the HBCUs established under the 1890 Morrill Act (*n* = 10) were excluded for not having a DS director role or for not providing staff contact information. The lack of a director and/or contact information may point to the ways in which historical context, funding, number of students, etc. influence the offering of disability services at these campuses.

Considering methods, study limitations included lack of prolonged engagement in the field and reliance upon self-reported opinions and perspectives. As described, only one interview was conducted with each participant. Prolonged engagement in the field, such as additional interviews or the ability to observe additional changes over time, could add great value to the study. However, the study as designed addressed a significant gap in the literature and extended the scholarly conversation in ways that the predominantly quantitative literature on DS professionals has been unable to do. Further, the study did not include observational data (Glesne, 2016)—as interviews were conducted virtually—and relied upon the perspectives and opinions reported by participants. To the extent possible, each participants' interview data was triangulated with organizational documents. Additionally, participant responses were analyzed to produce themes across individual interview data. Future studies might include observational data to enrich the study and generate additional data about the organizational context of DS offices.

Additional limitations and considerations in terms of methods included aspects of the recruitment strategy. Although most university websites had contact information listed for DS directors and staff, this recruitment strategy may become less effective amidst growing concerns over staff and faculty safety on college campuses and as more universities move to internal directories accessible only to members of the organization. Further, researchers should carefully consider the timing of recruitment and data collection for this population. As indicated through the study findings, DS directors are busy professionals managing the day-to-day operations of staffed offices while also managing several groups of university stakeholders and working to advance strategic priorities. As a primarily student facing office, participating in interviews during the

academic semester might consistently be difficult for this population. Recruitment and data collection for this study began early in the Spring semester of 2024. Engaging in recruitment and data collection efforts in the summer semester might lead to increased study participation. Beginning recruitment in the middle of fall or spring academic semesters may be successful, but researchers must recognize that the beginning and ends of traditional academic semesters represent very busy periods for these professionals with high volumes of accommodation requests and final exam proctoring, respectively.

Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice

College students with disabilities represent a growing percentage of the college-going population, currently estimated at nearly 21% of undergraduate students (NCES, 2023b). The lack of current research on the work of DS offices and their directors outside of accommodations represents a critical gap in the literature on postsecondary disability services and supports for college students with disabilities. The findings I have presented in this study contribute to addressing this gap and suggest several implications for theory, research, and practice.

Implications for Theory

Compared to the larger field of neo-institutionalism, the study of institutional work remains a newer, less-researched area within neo-institutionalist inquiry. Findings from this study demonstrated the utility of a neo-institutionalist framework and an institutional work lens through which to examine the work of DS directors that could be applied to studies of other actors in different contexts. The study findings supported theoretical assumptions of neo-institutionalism and institutional work around the important role institutions play in constraining and empowering actors. The findings

demonstrated the ways in which DS directors recognized (either implicitly or explicitly) and responded to institutions that shaped their work. In terms of future studies of institutional work, the present study findings offer several considerations.

Designing with Nested Contexts in Mind. Researchers should consider designing studies of institutional work to better elucidate the role of intersecting and nested institutional contexts. Oftentimes, studies of institutional work concentrate on a particular field, set of organizations, or group of organizational actors. Designing the study to capture actors' knowledge and perceptions about institutions across multiple levels adds a greater layer of depth to study findings. Further, such a strategy allows for more nuanced interpretations of the institutions to which actors are responding through various forms of institutional work.

Relational Forms of Institutional Work. Future studies of institutional work should continue to explore more relational forms of institutional work. Further, studies of relational institutional work should examine how actors create or uphold lasting institutions through this form of institutional work. The present study findings provided limited insights into some of the challenges of relational forms of institutional work. For instance, some of the DS directors' responses suggested that loose, informal normative networks were subject to collapse when incumbent staff members departed and new ones entered, resulting in rebuilding of the network. Future studies should further investigate and contribute to this area of institutional work.

Subtle Forms of Disruption. As previously discussed, disruptive forms of institutional work are generally the least represented in studies of institutional work. The current study findings offered what might be considered two subtle forms of disruptive

institutional work, “permeating and infiltrating” and “maneuvering.” Rather than engaging in overt and obvious subversive actions, the DS directors in the study engaged in organizationally acceptable practices that still allowed them to disrupt institutions complicating or challenging their work. Future studies of institutional work should continue to expand our scholarly understanding of disruption through examining more subtle forms of disruptive institutional work by individual actors that operate inside acceptable approaches.

Implications for Research

Given that postsecondary disability services are vastly understudied, the findings from this study offer several implications for research. In this section, I present four key recommendations for future research on DS directors and DS offices.

DS Directors’ Identities. My study findings suggest a need for studies about additional contextual factors that might constrain and empower DS directors. I examined three interrelated contexts (legislative, professional, and organizational) grounded in neo-institutional theory to examine the ways in which DS directors engaged in various forms of institutional work. As such, consideration of DS directors’ personal backgrounds, identities, and worldviews were largely unexamined in the present study. However, DS directors’ identities and worldviews may reasonably influence their work and the ways in which they approach their work (Guzman & Balcazar, 2010). The study findings highlighted the ways in which DS directors responded to a range of misperceptions, including faculty biases towards college students with disabilities. Future research should seek to understand the ways in which DS directors’ own identities, experiences, worldviews, and beliefs about disability factor into their work. While some qualitative

research has begun to examine DS professionals' identities and worldviews (e.g., Strimel et al., 2023a), these studies focused broadly on DS staff (as opposed to directors only) and therefore focused exclusively on the interactive process of determining accommodations. Such future studies should focus on DS directors to gain insights into how their identities and worldviews shape the work of their DS offices and inform the strategies in which they select to engage.

Organizational Structures. The findings from this study offered valuable but incomplete insights into the role organizational structure plays in the work of a DS office. For instance, findings from the present study illuminated aspects like the close working relationships between DS directors, ADA coordinators, and university legal counsel. Additionally, the study findings emphasized the importance of forming positive relationships between the DS office and academic, student affairs, and student success units so that DS offices could be connected and involved across all critical aspects of campus. At the same time, future research could help illuminate whether certain organizational forms in terms of where DS offices are located within a university organizational structure are more advantageous than other forms. In other words, future research should examine whether it is advantageous for DS offices to report to one unit over another. Although the DS directors who participated in this study did not identify any disadvantages to their current reporting structure, more research is needed to better understand the role reporting structure might play in shaping the work of DS offices and the opportunities DS directors might have (or not have) to engage in certain practices or activities.

Campus Relationships and Partnerships. Relatedly, the findings from this

study illustrated the critical importance of campus relationships and partnerships in the work of DS directors. The study findings indicated that DS directors most often relied upon relationship-based strategies to advance their work of ensuring equal access for college students with disabilities. Future research should continue to build upon and expand these findings. For instance, future research might take a broad approach to develop a typology of DS office campus partnerships and collaborations; conversely, future research might take a deep dive into a unique or special campus partnership or collaboration to draw out key lessons and strategies. Such future research should also investigate how these collaborations and partnerships help DS directors engage in specific forms of institutional work or achieve certain desired outcomes.

Studies of Directors at Different Postsecondary Institutions. Lastly, future research should replicate this study with DS directors at different types of universities. My study findings are based on data derived from DS directors employed at public, four-year, land-grant PWIs. Thus, these findings may not represent how DS directors at other university types and at universities that serve different student populations understand the role of their DS offices, and these findings may not represent the kinds of institutional work in which they engage. Thus, future single case studies on the institutional work of DS directors should examine HBCUs, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), private universities, religious universities, small colleges, and community colleges, to provide a few examples. In addition to providing further insights into the work of DS directors and their offices, collectively such studies could offer valuable insights into the ways in which disability services are delivered across different types of universities to the different groups of college students they serve.

Implications for Practice

The study findings also suggest several implications practice. Here, I focus on key implications for campus leaders, faculty, AHEAD, and DS directors and practitioners.

Campus Leaders. My study findings pointed to the important role that the professional association AHEAD played in the work of DS directors. AHEAD served as an important source of learning about new ideas and best practices for DS directors through engagement in professional development, conferences, and networking, among other resources. Additionally, the study findings supported prior research indicating that DS professionals often come from varied academic disciplines and professional backgrounds. These findings suggest that any DS director or DS professional would benefit from engagement in a standardizing professional organization to further support their socialization to the field of postsecondary disability services. Campus leaders, particularly those supervising DS offices, should set aside professional development funds for DS directors and their staff so that they all have AHEAD memberships. Doing so will support the development of DS professionals with an expanded tool bag to best meet the needs of their campus and fulfill their mission to ensure equal access for college students with disabilities.

Further, my study findings indicate a need for greater clarity around the role of DS offices on college campuses. Campus leaders must support their DS directors and DS offices by helping them better clarify their role and scope amongst the campus community. For instance, campus leaders could infuse descriptions of the DS office purpose and scope into key organizational documents and socialization events like faculty and staff onboarding and training. Campus leaders should work to assist DS

directors with their outreach and collaboration efforts, ensuring they have access to key campus stakeholders and groups. Additionally, campus leaders should support the work of their DS offices by reinforcing the idea that access is a shared commitment. If campus leaders support the work of DS offices in these ways, they will contribute to establishing new norms, narratives, and schemas that work towards a shared campus understanding of access for college students with disabilities.

Relatedly, campus leaders must do a better job of centering disability as an important component of diversity, equity, and inclusion on their campuses and supporting proactivity in terms of accessibility rather than reactivity. In other words, campus leaders must support a culture of anticipating diverse learners rather than reacting to them after the fact. For instance, campus leaders should ensure that their campus Teaching and Learning, Instructional Design, Online Learning, and/or Accessible Materials offices or centers are providing resources and guidance on Universal Design. Additionally, campus leaders should incentivize and support faculty and staff to learn about and practice Universal Design strategies by creating opportunities for this work to be considered or evaluated as part of work plans and performance evaluations.

Faculty. Along the same lines, my study findings illustrated the prevalence of campus misperceptions about the work of DS offices, especially amongst faculty. Faculty must recognize their shared responsibility for providing access for college students with disabilities in their courses. The responsibility for providing equal access does not fall solely on the shoulders of DS professionals. To that end, faculty must recognize the role they play in creating inaccessible environments that necessitate the need for accommodations. For example, failure to caption videos, reliance on tests that require

rote memorization, and inflexible assignments with outcome-irrelevant requirements are just a few examples of the ways in which faculty embed barriers within their classrooms. At the same time, the findings from this study highlighted that DS offices exist to support faculty as much as they exist to support students, as faculty are integral to students' learning experiences. Faculty should consider learning about and utilizing inclusive practices, such as Universal Design, to design their courses in ways that are more accessible and meaningful for all students, not just those with disabilities. Connecting back to the recommendations for campus leaders, faculty should discuss with their department chairs how such work might be factored into their work plans and annual reviews.

AHEAD. Given the finding that AHEAD contributed to how DS directors understood the role of their offices and carried out their daily work, AHEAD should consider expanding its professional development and resource offerings to support DS directors and leaders of DS offices more specifically with building relationships across their campuses. Such resources should also address maintaining campus relationships and partnerships to address some of the issues stemming from reliance upon loose, informal networks. Although AHEAD currently offers one master class related to this topic aimed at seasoned professionals, additional resources would greatly benefit DS directors and leaders, especially new ones. For instance, future AHEAD webinar series might include panels of DS professionals and higher education leaders or practitioners who can share lessons learned from building successful campus partnerships between DS offices and other campus units. Similar to their selection of resources for "new professionals," AHEAD might also develop resources and guides for new DS directors and leaders on

learning about their campus culture and identity, advocating for resources, raising awareness on campus, partnering with their supervising unit, and offering presentation templates and ideas for different audiences, to name a few possible resources. Additionally, the study findings pointed to the value of DS directors' varied backgrounds and professional experiences in terms of helping them fulfill their roles and advance their work. AHEAD should leverage the diverse backgrounds and experiences of their members to help develop the suggested events, tools, and resources.

DS Directors and DS Professionals. Lastly, the findings in this study illuminated several strategies in which DS professionals engaged to advance their work related to ensuring equal access for college students with disabilities. Specifically, many of these strategies were relational in nature. DS directors and DS professionals should examine their own current strategies and practices around advocating, collaborating, and networking with peers on campus and within their professional field. DS directors specifically should consider the ways in which they and their staff might increase their visibility and presence on campus in ways that are consistent with campus culture and norms, such as participating in orientation, college or department meetings, or new employee onboarding events. Similarly, DS directors should identify key campus individuals and offices with which they would like to collaborate and build relationships with. Lastly, DS directors might also consider the ways in which they can utilize stories and narratives about campus or their office to construct their office identity and perhaps make stronger arguments for gaining critical resources.

Conclusion

This qualitative, single case study examined how DS directors understood the role

of their office within the three interconnected contexts of federal legislation, their professional memberships and experiences, and their organizational setting. Drawing upon DS directors' descriptions of how they understood the role of their office within these contexts, this study also described the strategies in which DS directors engaged—as organizational actors—to advance the work of their offices. The study design and interpretation of findings was guided by the theoretical framework of neo-institutional theory and institutional work. The case study records consisted of participant demographic survey data, participant interview transcripts, and publicly available organizational documents collected from each participant's university and DS office website. Six DS directors participated in the study.

The study findings supported, challenged, and extended the literature on postsecondary disability services in several ways. Broadly, the study findings aligned with literature on the evolution of federal disability legislation within the context of higher education. Further, DS directors' need to occasionally use the law as leverage with faculty aligned with research indicating that campus climates for disability are still rife with biases and stigma. The study findings primarily challenged prior literature by illuminating the many other forms of work in which DS directors engage outside of accommodations, a focus that dominates the literature on postsecondary disability services. In terms of extending the literature, the study findings provided evidence that DS directors do engage in a great deal of advocacy and awareness work, which had yet to be clearly documented within the literature. The study findings also emphasized AHEAD as an important source of professional networking and learning for DS directors that contributed to how they understood the role of their offices and carried out their daily

work.

Considering the theoretical framework, the study findings broadly supported the application neo-institutional theory and institutional work to study how a group of professionals develop contextualized understandings of their role and then use those understandings to guide their practices and behaviors. My study findings suggested that, while DS directors drew specific understandings from each context, they relied upon the combination of all three contexts to fully understand the role of their DS office. The study findings also indicated DS directors engaged in institutional work strategies that aligned with what they understood to be their role and purpose on their college campuses. Particularly, my interpretation of the findings suggested that DS directors preferred more relational forms of institutional work, as opposed to more authoritative or punitive approaches. In terms of disrupting institutions, DS directors opted for more subtle approaches, working their way into campus spaces and maneuvering within yet perhaps at the margins of normative boundaries.

The study findings also indicated that much more research is needed on DS directors and postsecondary disability services broadly. The need for high-quality postsecondary disability services and campus leadership around disability and access will only continue to grow, given the rising numbers of college students reporting disabilities and national trends in reported mental health struggles among college students. With more research and more champions for disability access and inclusion on college campuses, perhaps the structures and services of DS offices will one day enjoy taken-for-granted status, with shared responsibility for equal access being "just the way we do things."

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APPENDIX A

Demographic Questionnaire

1. First Name:

2. Last Name:

3. Please share a preferred pseudonym:

4. What is the name of your college/university?

5. What is the name of your office?

6. To which office/unit does your office report?

7. What is your title?

8. For approximately how many years have you:
    a. Been in your current role?
    b. Worked in disability services in higher education?
    c. Worked in higher education?

9. What is the highest level of schooling or degree you have completed?

    a. High school graduate or equivalent
    b. Some college credit, no degree
    c. Trade/technical/vocational training
    d. Associate's degree
    e. Bachelor's degree
    f. Master's degree
    g. Professional degree
    h. Doctorate degree
    i. Other: _________

10. [Question displays for option c] What was the focus of your training?

11. [Question displays for options d-h] What is the discipline of your degree? (E.g., counseling, higher education)

12. Please list any professional memberships you hold:

13. How do you describe your gender?
    a. Female
    b. Male
    c. Non-Binary
    d. Transgender
    e. Prefer to self-describe: ____________
    f. Prefer not to answer

14. Do you consider yourself of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?
    a. No (if selected, logic displays next question)
    b. Yes (if selected, logic displays options)
        i. Mexican/Mexican American/Chicano
        ii. Puerto Rican
        iii. Cuban
        iv. Other Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin: _____________
        v. Prefer to self-describe: ____________
    c. Prefer not to answer (if selected, logic displays next question)

15. How do you describe your race?
    a. White
    b. African American/Black
    c. American Indian/Alaska Native
    d. Asian American/Asian
    e. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
    f. Prefer to self-describe: ____________
    g. Prefer not to answer

APPENDIX B

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Thank you again for taking the time to meet with me. As my email mentioned, I'm interested in learning about how directors of postsecondary disability services offices understand their role and the role of their office based upon several information sources. These information sources include federal legislation related to disability; your university's mission, policies, and practices; any professional associations you are a part of; and your own professional experiences. I also seek to learn about how you use this information to make decisions about the work your office should be doing; how you make sure your office fulfills its role.

You've already signed an informed consent document by email, but I want to take a few minutes to review and answer any questions you may have. [Reviews informed consent]

The interview will last no more than 60 minutes. I have a series of 15 main questions I'll ask you, with likely several follow-up questions spread throughout.

I'll record the interview so that I can transcribe it for data analysis. However, if at any time after the recording has begun (including before you answer any question), you request that I stop recording, your request will be honored. I am now going to begin recording.

Thank you! I'll start by asking you to tell me a bit about your office and yourself.

1. **What do you see as the key functions of your office?**
    a. What are your primary responsibilities as director?
2. **In what ways have your previous personal and professional experiences informed your work as a director?**
    a. What motivated you to pursue your current role?
3. **In what ways do your professional affiliations and memberships inform your work as a director?**

Thank you for telling me about yourself and your professional background. I'm now going to ask you some questions about the history of your office and the role of legislation in your work.

4. **What can you tell me about the history of your office?**
    a. What significant changes, if any, has your office undergone? Why did these changes occur?
    b. How long has your office had its current name? Why did the name change, and what were the intended outcomes of that change?
5. **What is the role of disability-related legislation in your work?**
    a. What challenges does your office face related to legislation?
    b. Suppose someone states that your office only exists to comply with federal legislation—how would you respond in your capacity as director?

Our focus is now going to shift to your campus and your perceptions of campus expectations for your office.

6. **What is your perception of what campus leaders think your office does?**
    a. What is your perception of what faculty members think your office does?
    b. What is your perception of what students think your office does?
    c. What complications, if any, result from campus perceptions of your work?
    d. How do you address misperceptions held by any of these groups or individuals?
7. **What policies are your office expected to follow?**
    a. In what ways do these policies help the work of your office? Hinder your work?
8. **What practices are your office expected to follow?**
    a. In what ways do these practices help your work? Hinder your work?
9. **In what ways does your office measure success?**
    a. In what ways does your office contribute to achieving the campus mission?

My last set of questions focus on learning about actions you've taken or strategies you've used to ensure your office is fulfilling its role.

10. **How do you uphold current policies and practices?**
11. **In what ways, if any, have you expanded the services of your office? If so, how did you accomplish that expansion?**
12. **In what ways, if any, have you made other changes to the work of your office? How did you accomplish those changes?**
13. **How have you navigated making any changes to policies and practices?**

14. **Please give me an example of when you had a conflict in your work. How did you navigate that conflict?**
15. **How have you navigated gaining support on campus for your work?**
16. **Is there anything else you would like to share? Are there any other questions you wish I would have asked?**

This concludes the interview. I really appreciate your time spent speaking with me and sharing your knowledge, experiences, and expertise.

APPENDIX C

Coding Output for Interview Transcripts

Structural Coding		Sample In Vivo Codes
Legislation	Director Responsibilities	abiding by best practices
		complaints
		staff training
		grievances and lawsuits
	Law as guiding practice	a framework
		ADA...go to for everything
		not all clearly laid out
		relying on the OCR cases
	Legal obligation	we have to meet those standards
		a carrot on a stick
		the law is the ace in my pocket
		we're federally mandated
	Office Function	access
		equity component
		provision of accommodations
		we're a compliance entity
Professional Memberships and Experiences	Involvement in professional associations	hearing from others
		AHEAD
		gives me new ideas
		professional development
	Professional experiences	confidence that I can do this work
		I've just moved up and up
		navigating the politics
		pull in those previous experiences
Organizational Context	Campus Disability History	over a 200% increase in students
		before section 504
		early start
		not really something to brag about
	Director Responsibilities	appeal process
		assessment initiatives
		outreach initiatives

		university committees
	Faculty Perceptions	hand it out like candy
		they just don't understand
		too difficult to get accommodations
		training with faculty
	Leader Perceptions	academic advisor
		accommodations needs
		good reputation on campus
		they think we do everything
	Student Perceptions	can never be denied
		hodgepodge
		hands-on
		gatekeepers
	Following campus policies	animal policies
		informal agreements
		liberal approach
		all university policies
	Following campus practices	kick it to the provost
		role and scope
		evaluating our processes
		setting up accommodations
	Measuring success	feedback surveys
		consistent in our practices
		demographics
		non-user survey
Institutional Work	Changes to work of office	consistent in our decision making
		appeals process
		build relationships
		the way we assign students
	Changing policies and practices	have a conversation
		collaboration
		listening to the staff
		approved by my vice chancellor
	Expansion of services	success coaching
		be visible
		additional staff
		student group
	Gaining Campus Support	trust and respect
		why people don't trust us
		build relationships
		making people feel comfortable

CURRICULUM VITA

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Education:

PhD, Educational Leadership & Organizational Development, University of Louisville — Anticipated May 2024

Graduate Certificate in Organizational Change in Higher Education, University of Louisville — Dec 2022

MA in English, University of Louisville — May 2016

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Graduate courses taught:

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Program Coordinator, Military Initiatives — Jun 2018–Mar 2020
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Writing Consultant, Student Support Fellow — May 2016–Jun 2018
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Buckley, J. B., Rivers, I. D., George, C. E., **Pratt, T. L.**, & Pifer, M. J. (2023). "Not drawing attention to ourselves": Campus climate and sense of belonging for ROTC cadets. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000469

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Presentations:

Gathof, T. L. (2016, February). *Exploring the Cracks: Foundational Writing Center Scholarship and the Ideology of Ability* [paper presentation]. Southern Writing Center Association Conference, Columbus, GA, United States.

Buckley, J. B., Rivers, I., George, C., **Pratt, T. L.,** & Pifer, M. J. (2020, November). *"Not drawing attention to ourselves": Campus climate and sense of belonging for ROTC cadets* [paper presentation]. Association for the Study of Higher Education Annual Meeting, virtual.

Turner, H.A. & **Pratt, T. L.** (2021, February). *Speaking their Language: Translation and Military Support Services in a Virtual Environment* [workshop]. National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Symposium on Military-Connect Students, virtual.

Pifer, M. J., Sun, J. C., Turner, H. A., & **Pratt, T. L.** (2021, April). *A Part, but Apart: An Exploration of Legitimacy-Seeking Goals, Behaviors, and Outcomes Within ROTC*

[paper presentation]. American Educational Research Association Annual Conference, virtual.

George, C. E., Buckley, J. B., Rivers, I., & **Pratt, T. L.** (2022, April). *"So Many Opportunities Laid Out Before Me": College Students' Decisions to Join Army ROTC* [paper presentation]. American Educational Research Association Annual Conference, San Diego, CA, United States.

Cermak, R., **Pratt, T. L.**, & Buckley, J. B. (2023, February). *Tell Them 'Why': The Learning Science Principles Behind Instructional Strategies* [interactive session]. University of Louisville Celebration of Teaching and Learning Conference, Louisville, KY.

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