

Christine Bouck, Sarah Williams, and Emily Johnson
Project STEPP
East Carolina University
<http://www.ecu.edu/cs-educ/stepp/index.cfm>

Context

The information shared here is part of a MAEd thesis project conducted by Christine Bouck during the spring 2010 semester. Student participants in Project STEPP served as the college students that high school participants had the opportunity to meet and with whom they discussed their college questions. Thesis committee members were Dr. Dan Boudah (Chair), Dr. Annette Greer, Dr. Harold Griffin, and Dr. Karen Voytecki

Questions of High School Students with Learning Disabilities About College

Abstract

As college enrollment by students with learning disabilities increases, educators in both secondary and postsecondary environments are learning more about the transition challenges they face. Effective supports must stem from understandings about typical high school student questions and priorities. This presentation describes questions asked by high school students with LD given the opportunity to discuss university life with college students.

Introduction

- Over 30 million children and adults in the US have identified learning disabilities or attention deficit disorder (Mooney & Cole, 2000).
- Students with learning disabilities exhibit a higher dropout rate and unemployment rates and lower rates of postsecondary participation than their peers without learning disabilities (Murray & Wren, 2003).
- Students with learning disabilities may not be encouraged to pursue a college degree.
- Parents may not know all of the options and services available in the postsecondary setting. Many students may feel inferior and do not believe they have the intelligence to succeed in higher education (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). Staff and students may feel that the services offered at college will somehow minimize the integrity of the work and degree (Getzel & Thoma, 2008).
- Still, the rate of students with learning disabilities attending college is increasing (Gil, 2007).
- Some students have limited involvement in their future planning, and the laws governing services in high school and college settings are very different.
- Self determination skills are critical for students with LD in postsecondary settings (Getzel & Thoma, 2008).

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative thesis project was to examine the types of questions asked by high school students with learning disabilities about attending college. By collecting and analyzing student questions, information about what students know and do not know can be used to inform services and supports provided by secondary and post-secondary settings during this important life transition.

Research Question

What questions do high school students with learning disabilities have about going to college?

Participants

- Eleven (11) junior-level high school students
- All with identified learning disabilities
- All enrolled in a curriculum assistance college preparatory program at a high school in eastern North Carolina.
- Nine (9) males and two (2) females

Note: Six (6) first and second year college students with learning disabilities also participated in the thesis project. Their responses to high school student questions were collected, but have not been included with this analysis.

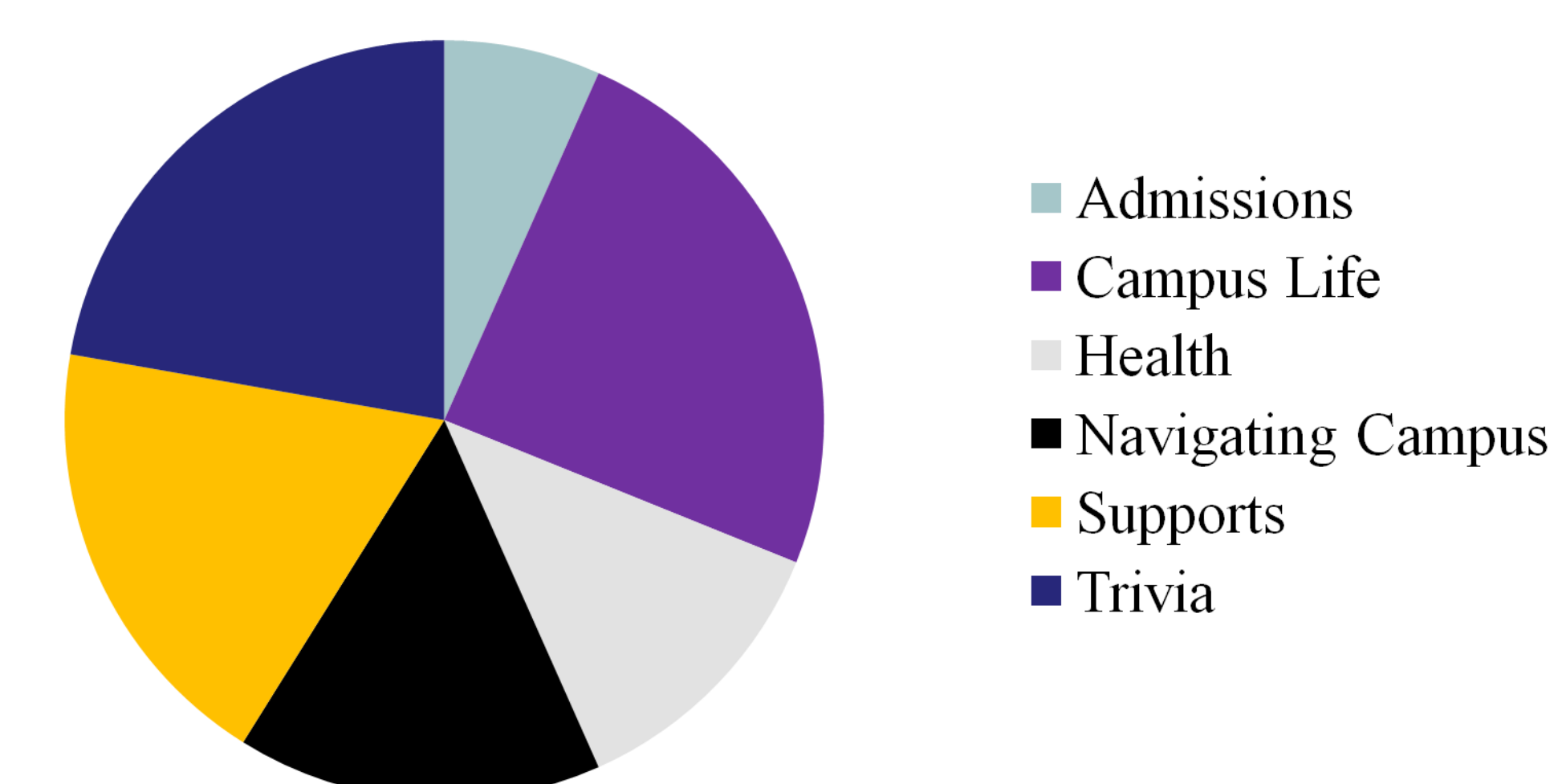
Materials and Methods

- High School participants traveled to the university setting by bus accompanied by two teachers.
- Three opportunities were arranged for students to ask questions:
 - Campus Tour facilitated by college students
 - Small group discussions facilitated by college students
 - Whole group information session facilitated by ECU Disability Support Services and Project STEPP staff
- All questions and student responses were audio-recorded and later transcribed.
- Data were analyzed in four steps:
 - Organizing and preparing data for analysis (transcribing, copying, extracting comments from college students and staff)
 - Content analysis (identifying, coding, and categorizing) (Patton, 1990)
 - Inductive analysis (indigenous themes/sensitizing themes...original questions/clarification questions) & Member Check
 - Interpreting results

Results - Themes

153 questions

- Academics
Example Question: "What's geology?"
- Admissions/Status
Example Question: "What score do you need on the SAT to get in?"
- Campus Life
Example Question: "Do you have curfews here?"
- Health and Wellness
Example Question: "What's it like [in the recreation center]?"
- Navigating Campus
Example Question: "Is it hard to find your way around campus?"
- Supports and Disability 22
Example Question: "How does note taking work?"
- Trivia or Personal
Example Question: "Did you always know you were coming to ECU?"

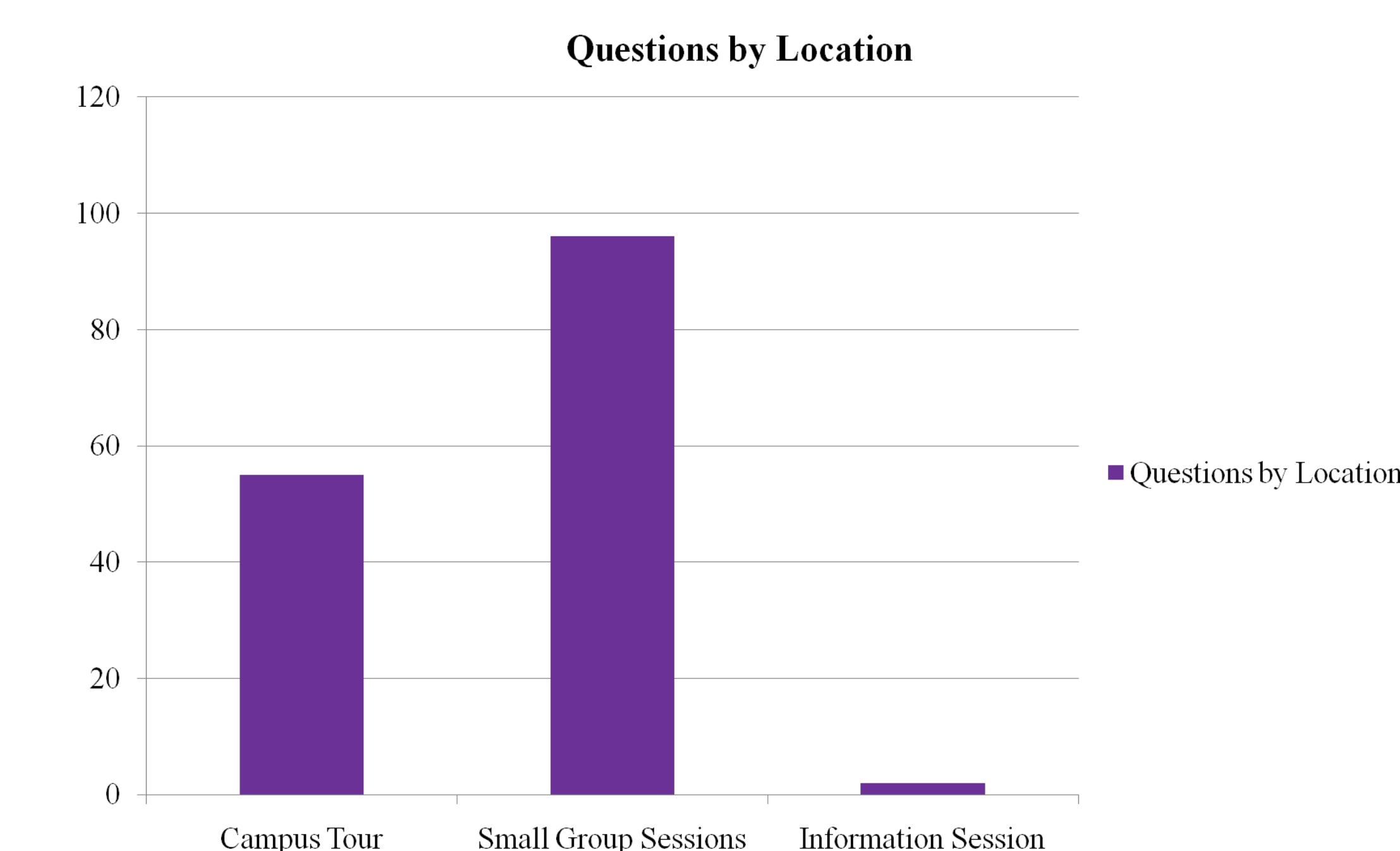


Favorite Quotes

"Is there streaking at ECU?"

"Can I push one [blue light]?"

"Is it true that if you stick a body part in the fountain you have to pay a fine?"



Conclusions

- Students overall asked very few questions.
- Even with some coaching from their teacher these students do not know what to ask. They do not know what they do not know.
- Questions that were asked demonstrated little depth or understanding of the complexities of being a postsecondary student with a learning disability. Even though the academic theme incorporated the second highest number of questions, most were very basic (e.g. "How are the maths here?").
- It is vital that students with LD have assistance in preparing to make the transition to college.
- These students need firsthand experience and as much exposure to postsecondary life as possible.

References

- Getzel, E.E. & Thoma, C.A. (2008). Experiences of college students with disabilities and the importance of self-determination in higher education settings. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 1(8).
- Gil, L.A. (2007). Bridging the transition gap from high school to college: Preparing students with disabilities for a successful postsecondary experience. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 40(2), 12-15.
- Janiga, S.J. & Costenbader, V. (2002). The transition from high school to postsecondary education for students with learning disabilities: A survey of college students with learning disabilities: A survey of college service coordinators. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 35 (5), 462-468.
- Mooney, J. & Cole, D. (2000). *Learning outside the lines*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Murray, C. & Wren, C.T. (2003). Cognitive, academic, and attitudinal predictors of the grade point averages of college students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 36(5), 407-415.
- Patton, M.Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*, second edition. Newbury Park: SAGE Publications, Incorporated.

