

DECOUPLING AND DISABILITY AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY

A Thesis

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by

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## Abstract

This study explores the interactions between students with disabilities and faculty members at the postsecondary level of education. Drawing on Bromley and Powell's (2012) description of decoupling, this work explores the ramifications of means-ends decoupling within organizations as an institutional response to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). This research suggests that problems in the accommodation process for students with disabilities can be traced to loose coupling within organizational subunits, resulting in faculty questioning of the validity of student disability diagnoses when these students register for legally mandated academic accommodations. This work concludes by providing practical suggestions for improving these experiences in future interactions. This study is one of the only articles focusing on students with disabilities and faculty members to combine both quantitative and qualitative research; furthermore, the data collected for this research is vital because it has been collected from participants who were all able to benefit from recent relevant legislation, providing new insight into the lived experience of students with disabilities under the ADA and the subsequent Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Conor Callahan is a M.S. candidate for the Organizational Behavior Department of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR School) at Cornell University. Conor graduated with his B.S. in Industrial and Labor Relations from Cornell University in 2012 before enrolling in the BS/MS program offered by the ILR School. Conor served as the teaching assistant for thirteen courses related to his research during his time as a graduate student at Cornell. Working with six different professors, Conor assisted four different departments of the ILR School and the Employment and Disability Institute. Furthermore, Conor has worked as a research assistant for the Organizational Behavior Department in varying capacities for the last four years. Outside of the academic realm, he has a younger brother with autism and has spent the last seven years working for Camp A.N.C.H.O.R., an organization which provides recreational services for people with varying disabilities.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADA- Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

ADAAA- Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008

ADHD- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

OCD- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

SDS- Student Disability Services Office of Cornell University



## Literature Review

### Introduction

Americans with disabilities make up a large portion of the population and this number has continued to grow in recent years, culminating in a total of approximately one in five Americans by the 2012 Census (Brault, 2012). These disabilities include a wide range of impairments, ranging from people with both physical, or visible, disabilities (for example, people with amputated limbs, people in wheelchairs, and the visually-impaired) and mental, or invisible, disabilities (for example people with cognitive disabilities such as ADHD, OCD, or autism). Over the last several decades significant legislation has been passed in an attempt to secure equality for people with disabilities in organizations.

Despite this legislation, people with disabilities often encounter significant difficulties in their attempts to overcome discrimination within both work and educational organizations and it is clear that advocates for people with disabilities have a large amount of work to do before accomplishing their goal of equality for people with disabilities. The number of people with disabilities has steadily risen between 2002 and 2010, consistent with the increased rate of diagnoses for youth with disabilities (United States Census Bureau, 2010). The increasing number of people with disabilities suggests that the number of students with disabilities will also continue to increase in the near future, placing an even greater importance on combating discrimination in postsecondary education (HEATH Resource Center, 1999). The implementation of federal legislation and the improved overall conditions for student accommodations are factors which have already attributed to these rising numbers and will

continue to significantly impact student success in the future (Hergenrather & Rhodes, 2007, Kiuahara & Huefner, 2008).

Pursuing postsecondary education has been shown to be one of the most important human capital investments that a person can make, especially in the contemporary knowledge-based economy of the United States (Dunn, 2013). Because students are not required to disclose their disability, it is very difficult to measure the exact number of students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education. However, evidence suggests that the number of youth with disabilities pursuing postsecondary education rose from the 1990's to 2005, the latest year from which data is available (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005). The number of students with a disability was estimated at 11.3% of undergraduate students for the 2003-2004 academic year (NCES, 2007).

The benefits to enrolling postsecondary education extend beyond the classroom for people with disabilities. These benefits are particularly salient in the employment of people with disabilities. During the 2007 recession, individuals with a college degree were less likely to lose their current jobs and were more likely to be hired by new employers in the United States (Carnevale, Jayasundera, & Cheah, 2013). Furthermore, it was reported that 60% of individuals with disabilities who had completed a postsecondary degree program were employed during the turbulent labor market period, as opposed to only 34% of their peers with only a high school degree (Fogg, Harrington, & McMahon, 2010). As the number of students with disabilities enrolling in postsecondary education increases, it is imperative to examine the experiences of these students to insure they are able to continue to receive the benefits offered by higher education.

Research on people with disabilities has often focused on administrative issues. While examining bureaucratic structures has been helpful, this approach has not been influenced by neo-institutional theory. In this thesis, I bring an institutional lens to examining the impact of legislation pertaining to people with disabilities in postsecondary education organizations. By doing so, I focus on not only the interactions between faculty and students, but also on the strategic response to this legislation and the resulting ramifications. This is primarily done by incorporating institutional theory into the internal issues associated with coupling between varying subunits within the organization, the examination of societal expectations of people with disabilities, and the elaboration of internal organizational structures in accordance with the principles of institutional isomorphism.

It is important to first define several of the terms which will be used regularly throughout the following research. First, disability is defined as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such an individual” (ADA, 1990). This definition includes people with both physical, and visible, disabilities and mental, or invisible, disabilities. An abbreviated list of disabilities common at Cornell University can be found in Appendix E. It is important to note, however, that these disabilities can, and often do, overlap, impacting both the physical and mental tasks undertaken by people with disabilities. This definition was chosen for this study because it follows the most recent federal legislation which is relevant to this study. This study, consistent with the relevant legislation, was intended to be broad and encompass multiple disabilities. For reasons detailed in the research setting section of this work, most students at Cornell have either invisible, or cognitive disabilities, or physical disabilities which are not related to mobility, and thus are similarly difficult for an observer to immediately detect. The lack of a visible disability for students at postsecondary

universities may exacerbate the issues inherent in student-faculty relations, making Cornell an ideal setting for this research.

Next, I define discrimination as the “treatment or consideration of, or making a distinction in favor of or against, a person or thing based on the group, class, or category to which that person or thing belongs rather than on individual merit” (Discrimination, n.d.). As with the definition used for disability, this definition is intended to be broad. For the purposes of this study, discrimination includes both conscious and unintentional actions and opinions towards people with disabilities. Throughout this research discrimination will be examined in a variety of settings in which students with disabilities interact with faculty members, though the majority of detailed instances of discrimination occurred during the accommodation process.

Before the literature review regarding disability studies can be provided it is important to first detail the relevant legislation which impacts people with disabilities in organizational settings. It is imperative to understand this legal background before progressing further because the legislation revolving around people with disabilities defines their reality within organizations. This legislation, although passed with the intention of insuring rights for people with disabilities, has not yet resulted in the equality desired by disability advocates, as illuminated by the research below. This failure in the postsecondary setting can be traced in part back to poor implementation between the programs imagined for students with disabilities and the realistic legal implementations.

### Relevant Disability Legislation

The first national civil rights legislation relevant to postsecondary education and disability is Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This act is widely acknowledged as

“the first national civil rights law to view the exclusion and segregation of people with disabilities as discrimination and to declare that the Federal Government would take a central role in reversing and eliminating this discrimination” (National Council on Disability, 1997). The Rehabilitation Act was monumental in aiding the matriculation of students with disabilities into postsecondary education throughout the United States by providing the first piece of legislation which tied organizational compliance to the receipt of federal funds. Specifically, the Act states that “no otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States... shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial service” (1973). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provided strong support for people with disabilities in the United States, but the next major piece of legislation pertaining to people with disabilities would prove to be even more instrumental in prohibiting discrimination.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) followed the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, providing a groundbreaking piece of legislation not only in the United States, but also globally. Upon its passage into law, the ADA joined the Rehabilitation Act as the most comprehensive federal civil rights law used to protect the rights of people with disabilities in the United States (Barazandeh, 2005). As noted earlier, the ADA defines a person with a disability as a person with “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such an individual” (ADA, 1990). Furthermore, the Act also prohibits discrimination against any individual who is regarded or misclassified as having had a record of impairment as covered by the definition of a person with a disability (ADA, 1990). This definition prohibited discrimination against people with disabilities in most aspects of life, notably including both education and employment.

The ADA was intended to make significant changes to the manner in which people with disabilities were treated by organizations. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court chose to narrow the intended definition of the groups of people covered by the original Act in a series of holdings made shortly following the passage of the law. These acts, including *Sutton v. United Air Lines, Inc.*, and *Toyota Motor Manufacturing v. Williams*, were seen by Congress as a clear misinterpretation by the Supreme Court (Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act, 2009). In these cases and others similar to them, the Supreme Court decided that certain disabilities would not be covered even though the Court recognized that the employees had a disability. For example, in the *Sutton v. United Air Lines, Inc.* case, the court ruled that an employee with a visual impairment could be discriminated against in the hiring process since the person could fully correct their disability with the assistance of corrective eye lenses (Goldstein, 2001). In order to insure that the Act appropriately protected all citizens intended to be included under the Act, a clearly-stated and purposefully wide definition of disability was written when the ADA was amended on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009 by the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA).

These three pieces of legislation afforded rights to people with disabilities which had previously been ignored by many organizations. One of the main stipulations insuring this equality was the requirement that organizations covered by the law, including postsecondary universities, provide reasonable accommodations to people with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are modifications to the tasks, environment, or to the manner in which routines are normally completed that enable individuals with disabilities to have an equal opportunity to participate in an academic program or job (United States Department of Education, 2007). This definition covers virtually all organizations, including those that employ or educate people with

disabilities. It is important to note that this definition does not seek to provide people with disabilities with an advantage over their peers, but simply mandates that people with disabilities be provided with an equal opportunity for success.

The accommodation process under United States law generally places the responsibility of the initial request upon the person requesting the accommodation, since they have the best knowledge of their needs (EEOC, 2002; Knap, Faley, & Long, 2006). Employees must clearly explain the impairment that requires an accommodation from their employers, and engage in an interactive dialogue until an appropriate accommodation can be agreed upon (EEOC, 2002; Knapp, et al., 2006; Taylor v. Principal Financial Group, Inc., 1996). In educational settings, students similarly bear the burden of proving their disability status to the university and then requesting an accommodation from a faculty member for each individual course.

Accommodations provided under the ADA and ADAAA must be judged as being “reasonable” by the employer and employee. In postsecondary institutions, such as Cornell, the university is considered the employer and the student is considered the employee. For postsecondary universities, accommodations may include the use of a computer with a word processor for note-taking, advance notice for schedule changes, exam modifications, and written instructions or one-on-one meetings to clarify expectations. The most common accommodation at Cornell University is extended time on classroom modifications, as this addresses many of the issues that students may face as a result of their disabilities (Cornell University, 2012).

Fortunately for students with disabilities, large educational organizations, such as Cornell University, typically are able to provide extensive accommodations to insure that members with disabilities receive appropriate and reasonable accommodations. A list of the most common accommodations, as listed by Cornell, is listed in Appendix D (Cornell University, 2012). In

workplace settings, some smaller companies may not realistically be able to afford expensive materials needed for certain accommodations. It is also possible that companies may not be able to provide accommodations altering physical areas due to unavoidable factors such as previously-existing building layouts which may be impossible to alter. Thus, the term “reasonable” accommodation must be examined on a case-by-case basis. Appropriate accommodations in the workplace often include flexible scheduling, modifying non-essential job duties, and modifying or altering a workplace location

Reasonable accommodations provided by organizations under the ADA are meant to be modifications enabling equal opportunity for people with disabilities while not imposing unbearable difficulties on those providing the assistance. The ADA requires that organizations make alterations unless doing so would “fundamentally alter” the nature of the program or result in an “undue hardship” for the employer (ADA, 1990). This caveat, upheld in the ADAAG, addresses concerns of equality for individuals without disabilities. It is especially important in postsecondary education, as research has found that faculty knowledge of legal responsibilities is one of the most important predictors of whether they are willing to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities, but their personal beliefs regarding students with disabilities have a significant effect on this predictor (Zhang et al., 2010).

Although the relevant legislation has made progress in advancing equality for people with disabilities, there are varying organizational implications that effect how others perceive people with disabilities within their organization (Stone & Colella, 1996). Below is a detailed description of the impact that this legislation has had on employment and postsecondary universities for people with disabilities, followed by a review of institutional theory and an



examination of how institutionalized discriminatory behaviors can have an impact on people with disabilities.

### Temporal Dynamics and Discrimination

Past research has demonstrated that organizational practices, rules, and technologies emerge, diffuse, and become legitimated over time and at varying rates (Leblebici, Salancik, Copay, & King, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983) enduring with varying stability over time (Christensen, 1997; Fligstein, 1991, Lawrence, Winn, & Jennings, 2001). Temporal research has also shown that time is tied to institutional events in social settings (Clark, 1985; Gurvitch, 1964; Sorokin & Merton, 1937). Temporal dynamics have become an increasingly important topic due to the difficulty in differing temporal maps, an argument consistent with evolving societal views, such as those towards people with disabilities (Ancona, Okhuysen, & Perlow, 2001). This research was later empirically demonstrated by Tolbert and Zucker (1983) in their research on the diffusion of civil service reform. The pattern of diffusion amongst organizations in their work began with early adoption of practices due to technical grounds and was later followed by organizations responding primarily to external legitimacy practices.

It is important to note that some institutions are more stable than others (Hoffman, 1999), due in part to variation in the powers implementing the institutional change (Lawrence et al., 2001). Consistent with prior research, I define stability as the length of time over which an institution remains highly diffused and legitimated (Lawrence et al, 2001). Discrimination against people with disabilities has been a consistent institution throughout time, resulting in a stable, long-standing institution. This type of institution is particularly difficult to overcome

because it has become a routine, or taken-for granted process (Jepperson, 1991; Powell, 1991). Furthermore, the power exerted in maintaining this institution is especially effective since it merely needs to be maintained (Lawrence et al., 2001).

Temporal frameworks are particularly relevant to disability studies as perceptions about people with disabilities have evolved over time. Specifically, legislation relevant to people with disabilities has not evolved at a pace consistent with societal perceptions. This incongruence has occurred in large part because of past theoretical models of disability. These models are meant to provide a general description of how disability is viewed by factors such as the legislation and cultural beliefs of a certain time period. The two most recent models have been labeled the “medical” and “social” models of disability. Two differing models of viewing disability were first suggested as the difference between the extent to which medicalization is a primary aspect of the societal perceptions of people with disabilities (Oliver, 1983). While the shift between these two models dates back to the 1960s, outdated legislation continues to impact daily interactions for people with disability due to persisting institutional stability.

As described by Michael Oliver (1990), the social model of disability focuses not on the limitations that disabilities may place on an individual but rather on societal failures to provide appropriate services and adequately support the needs of people with disabilities within organizations. Under this model, disability is a product of society and not an intrinsic characteristic of an individual; it is removed by eliminating physical and institutional barriers from the social environment that prevent people from participating in major life activities.

Based on past societal perceptions, the medical model of viewing disability focused the view of disability on the individual limitations that disabilities placed on individuals. Societal

perceptions regarding people with disabilities began to evolve over time, aided by the growing acceptance of people with disabilities. This shift toward a new theoretical model of viewing disability was due in large part to reforms passed by President John F. Kennedy who famously had a sister with a cognitive disability. Kennedy, a champion of the civil rights movement, encouraged the societal integration of all people, most notably African-Americans. This integration encouraged the acceptance of all people into society, setting the stage for furthering equality for people with disabilities via legislation such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The shift from the discriminatory medical model of disability to a new theoretical view of disability provided the opportunity for people with disabilities to make societal advancements in ways which had previously not been possible.

Although these competing models vary significantly in their treatment of people with disabilities, it is important to note that the social model directly followed the medical model. While societal perceptions of the abilities of people with disabilities changed, in many cases legislation was not altered in a consistent manner. Although new legislation was passed, including the relevant legislation discussed above, the legislation passed under the medical model was often simply left in place. Lawmakers, assuming the old legislation would simply become outdated over time, failed to foresee how continued institutionalized discrimination could eventually impact people with disabilities. This existence of this discrimination persisted because it had become institutionalized under the medical model; although society had begun to transition to the social model of viewing disability, legislative reform was not able to result in immediate shifts in institutionalized behaviors.

At the organizational level, institutional theory posits that firms seek to adopt practices in manners which best suit their interests. Lauren Edelman (1992) researched organizational

responses to legal ambiguity by observing the process by which organizations altered structures in response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In her work, she explains how organizations do not simply ignore or circumvent laws which are difficult to enforce, but constructed compliance in a manner which served the interests of the organization. Organizations that are sensitive to their legal environments develop forms of governance that conform to legal norms in order to achieve or preserve legitimacy while minimizing law's encroachment on managerial power (Edelman, 1990). This research is consistent with social reform law analyses which emphasize that those responsible for formulating, interpreting, and enforcing the laws are part of the dominant class and use their authority to construct law in a manner which preserves the status quo while giving the appearance of change (e.g. Freeman, 1982; Tushnet, 1984; Bumiller, 1988; Crenshaw, 1988).

The varying responses at both levels is partially explained by the opportunity for actors and organizations to respond to law as a process as opposed to a given authority that must be either obeyed or resisted (Edelman, 1992). One common organizational response is the alteration or elaboration of formal structures. The power to manipulate formal structure to adhere to legally prescribed models of organizational governance is an important means by which organizations reconcile differences between managerial interests and law (Edelman, 1992). This manipulation process results in a gradual, inconsistent institutionalization of organizational structures and practices. These institutionalized practices will be especially open to interpretation, symbolic implementation, and manipulation when there is greater ambiguity in the language of the legislation, fewer procedural constraints, weaker enforcement mechanisms, and a greater external stability (Edelman, 1992; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Lawrence et al., 2001).

While legislation pertaining to people with disabilities has been implemented, continuing discrimination suggests that the intended results of the policy and the actual practice are

disconnected. It is possible that this disconnect is due to the managerialization of law, or the process by which conceptions of law become progressively infused with managerial values (Edelman, Fuller, & Mara-Drita, 2001). This idea is consistent with the institutional approach, which suggests that new ideas will be more readily adopted by organizations if the ideas are viewed as beneficial for the organization (Abrahamson, 1996; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). This research suggests that the varying strategic responses adopted by organizations may lead to a gap between policy and a practice, a phenomena commonly referred to as decoupling (Edelman, 1992; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

## Organizational Theory and Institutionalism

### Institutional Isomorphism

Research examining institutional theory has provided valuable depictions of institutionalization in disciplines across the social sciences. Early work on institutionalism placed an emphasis on the taken-for granted characteristics of institutional rules, myths, and beliefs as a shared social reality and on the process by which these practices became infused with value (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Selznick, 1949, 1957). As work on institutional theory has evolved, the more recent focus of organizational analysis has examined the characteristics and varieties of these processes (e.g. DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1987a; Zucker, 1977, 1988) as well as the impact of the environment and change at the organizational level (e.g. DiMaggio, 1991; Meyer, Scott & Strang, 1987, Scott & Meyer, 1987, Tolbert & Zucker, 1983).

Research examining institutional responses has centered on two main processes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983): a) imitative or mimetic, detailing organizational adoption of others' successful elements when uncertain about alternatives (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and b)

normative transmission of social facts, generally from external sources such as the professions (Zucker, 1987). Maintaining legitimacy is vitally important to the success of an organization, and organizations have been shown to exhibit mimetic behaviors in order to align with external factors such as governmental legislation or widely-held societal beliefs (Edelman, 1992; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Sutton, Dobbin, Meyer, & Scott, 1994). By doing so, “an organization demonstrates that it is acting in collectively valued purposes in a proper and adequate manner” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). A general theme of the institutional perspective is that this conformity to social norms of acceptable behavior is theoretically required for organizational survival (Covaleski & Dirsmith, 1988). As Schelling (1978) suggests, organizations respond to an environment that consists of other organizations which are also responding to their environment, and this environment also consists of organizations responding to an environment of organizational responses. Thus, institutional theorists have emphasized both the survival value of conformity with the institutional environment and the advisability of adhering to external rules and norms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

As organizations emerge, they do so under the guidance of previously-established pressures. Since certain practices or structures within the organization may have been nonchalantly adopted from previously-established organizations, the efficiency of these practices or structures may not be fully examined by the actors being influenced (DiMaggio, 1988). While these expectations seemingly provide the safest route for survival, they are not so much calculated to maximize efficiency as they are regarded as proper or obvious. In this way, institutional theory illustrates how strategic choice may be preempted when organizations are unconscious of, or blind to, the institutional processes to which they adhere. While organizations exist in social environments, the impetus for organizational change is unclear because

organizations exist within an “iron cage” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Researchers have asserted that organizational change has resulted in increasing organizational homogeneity due to bureaucratization as opposed to diversification and the processes intended to maximize organizational efficiency (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Institutional isomorphism was first introduced when Kanter (1972) discussed forces pressuring communities to accommodate with the world outside the community. Her work was followed by scholars such as Aldrich (1979) who asserted that many of the major factors that organizations must take into account are other organizations. Organizations may define their structure and activities around functions or values that reflect institutionalized and prefabricated classifications of appropriate structure (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Furthermore, these behaviors can persist in the absence of any indication that these behaviors serve the organization’s own best interest or contribute to organizational efficiency or control (Tolbert, 1985; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983; Zucker, 1983).

Isomorphism is a constraining process that forces one organization in a given environment to resemble other organizations that face the same set of environmental conditions (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hawley, 1968). Other scholars have offered evidence suggesting that institutional uncertainty may lead firms to imitate the strategies implemented by other firms to which the focal firm has network ties (e.g. Burns and Wholey, 1993; Davis, 1991; Galaskiewicz & Wasserman, 1989). Thus, the diversity of organizational forms is reflective of the diversity of the focal organizations environmental influences (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). These ideas run contrary to the accounts of bureaucracy as the optimal form or organizational structure as detailed by Weber (1930 [1992]). The adoption of organizational forms which do not

maximize organizational efficiency may lead to inconsistencies between the actions and stated goals of the organization; this phenomenon is known as organizational decoupling.

## Decoupling

One of the earliest examinations of decoupling was conducted by Weick (1976), who viewed decoupling as the extent to which organizations altered their formal structures from daily governance activities in order to reduce the extent to which law constrained managerial functions. Soon after, Meyer and Rowan (1977) defined decoupling as the organizational response of displayed conformity to formal purposes to avoid social sanctions which resulted in a buffering of the formal conformity from the actual, internal practices within the organization. Organizations which are tightly coupled have a clear alignment of organizational goals, practices, and structures as opposed to organizations which fail to reach proper alignment, resulting in a loosely coupled organization. It was noted by Clark (1983) and Meyer and Rowan (1977) that universities would be a form of organization particularly susceptible to decoupling because their primary product is knowledge, an ambiguous goal. In recent decades, external pressures on organizations, including postsecondary universities, have intensified, increasing the demands for accountability, assessment, and transparency in organizations (Bromley & Powell, 2012).

Organizations are increasingly expected to display a wide variety of characteristics consistent with societal views, even though these goals may be far removed from, or even contradictory to, organizational production (Brunsson, 1989). This general trend has been referred to as the rationalization of the internal institutional environment (Boli, 2006; Zucker, 1987). Rationalizing pressures from the environment primarily comes in two forms (Bromley &



Powell, 2012). These forms are the organizational quest to secure legitimacy and the adoption of formal policies in order to avoid negative public opinion and legal sanctions. Nearly 30 years after his renowned work with Meyer, Rowan revisited the issue of decoupling in the U. S. school system, noting that school systems have also shifted toward a rational model. In this work, Rowan (2006) asserts that a new institutional analysis of the educational system would provide more insight into contemporary education if it focused on the role of social forces shaping new educational models via organizational isomorphism. Later work revealed that decoupling may also arise due to a third, internal pressure, as organizational actors attempt to protect their power relations by implementing policies meant to induce organizational inertia (Dobbin, 1994).

Although there was a relatively small amount of research devoted to examining organizational decoupling until recently (Scott, 1995; Westphal & Zajac, 2001), this phenomenon has begun to receive greater attention. The majority of research on decoupling has viewed decoupling as the result of organizational adoption of policies as opportunities to increase legitimacy and avoid social sanctions, resulting in largely symbolic and inconsequential implementation once adopted, or even the preservation of prior informal organizational routines (Anderson- Levitt, 2003; Edelman, 1992; Hannan & Freeman, 1989; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Pfeffer, 1981). Examination of drug abuse clinics has also detailed how conflicting organizational demands can lead to internal decoupling, resulting in inefficiencies such as the adoption of conflicting organizational practices (D'Aunno, Sutton, & Price, 1991; Peyrot, 1991).

Bromley and Powell, however, recently identified a second form of decoupling that exists at the structural level of organizations (2012). This form of decoupling, known as means-ends decoupling, details policies which are thoroughly implemented but which have a weak relationship to the core tasks of an organization. Thus, decoupling exists between the ends which

an organization aspires to achieve and the means by which they pursue those ends. Decoupling between means and ends occurs in settings where formal structures have significant organizational consequences, work activities are altered, and policies are implemented and evaluated, but scant evidence justifies that these activities are linked to organizational effectiveness or outcomes (Bromley & Powell, 2012). Drawn from Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Berger and Luckman (1966), this view conceptualized institutionalized decoupling as a consequence of organizations becoming isomorphic with widely-held societal views. Short and Toffel (2010) similarly showed that industrial facilities are more likely to comply with symbolic commitments to self-regulation standards if they are subject to heavy regulatory surveillance. Means-ends decoupling may assist in explaining why organizations implement a range of practices that have an opaque relationship to outcomes.

As suggested by Christine Oliver (1991), organizations take varying approaches to respond to external pressures; one of these responses, decoupling, often results in a largely symbolic response (Edelman, 1992). This variation in compliance is due in large part to legal ambiguity in relevant legislation (Edelman, 1992). Although these responses may be symbolic, the power the ramifications of these responses are not necessarily symbolic. For instance, a response allotting additional power to one organizational subunit may have ramifications on how this subunit interacts with other subunits within the organization. Furthermore, these responses may become embedded in the organization over time, resulting in sustained alteration of the organization (Edelman, 1992). All organizations have various actors with multiple and sometimes conflicting organizational interests (Harrison & Freeman, 1999; Somaya, Williamson, & Zhang, 2007; Tolbert & Hall, 2009). Thus, within an organization it is likely that different structural levels will have varying strategic responses. As noted by Scott and Gregg (2000),

faculty members may feel as though their opinion is solicited less from university disability services. In organizations where one subunit is able to force compliance on another, decoupling is likely to arise; furthermore, passive acquiescence to the external environment, as opposed to strategic adaptation, may determine organizational behavior at the subunit which can mandate compliance (Oliver, 1991).

Bromley and Powell (2012) note that decoupling amongst various organizational subunits is an area which has not been fully explored by researchers. The few articles detailing buffering between internal practices has examined the buffering between various departments or workers in organizations. Early on, Boynton and Zmud (1987) detailed the distance between information and technology departments from other organizational departments, and Leatt and Schneck (1984) observed subunits in hospitals as distinct entities. While not examining the relations between subunits directly, research in the strategy domain has long recognized the value of having business units operate relatively independently (Gupta, 1984; Horwitch & Thietart, 1987). This isolation has also been noted in other fields, including studies of corporate philanthropy and environmentalism (Lyon & Maxwell, 2011) and housing organizations (Binder, 2007). The recent increase in research on organizational complexity and institutional pluralism (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011) and multiple institutional logics (Lounsbury, 2007; Thorton & Ocascio, 1999) indicates that scholars are observing more instances of means-ends decoupling, consistent with the rise predicted due to the increasingly rationalized institutional environment (Bromley & Powell, 2012).

Means-ends decoupling is often linked to greater internal complexity (Bromley & Powell, 2012). In a study which examines data similar to that which is preceding the work detailed in this article, Power examined the creation of organizational subunits created explicitly to manage the

external audit process for organizations (1997). Power noted that the creation of these separate entities were a *prima facie* sign of organizational decoupling. As noted by both Power (1997) and Bromley and Powell (2012), means-ends decoupling has extensive organizational consequences, albeit often unintended ones. For example, in an educational environment, the end goal of a productive education can be strongly influenced by the means an organization implements on those providing the education.

One response to greater organizational complexity is the compartmentalization of multiple, conflicting logics (Greenwood et. al, 2011; Pratt & Foreman, 2000). These conflicting logics will likely impact varying subunits with negative consequences if the units are unable to collaborate. As shown by Binder (2007), subunits comprised of actors with varying priorities and expertise can lead to conflicts of interest between subunits. By studying a housing organization, Binder displayed how parties with different areas of expertise may not understand the actions taken by the other subunits, resulting in tensions between the two groups within the same organization. Presumably, these issues would be also manifest between subunits for other reasons; these reasons may include issues such as lack of trust between the subunits or power relations between the subunits.

Finally, it is worthwhile to note a recent series of studies on decoupling by Westphal, Zajac, and colleagues which detailed how corporations adopt elaborate and purportedly instrumental activities such as long-term incentive plans, stock repurchase programs, or total quality management programs, but implement the adopted models using varying methods (Fiss & Zajac, 2004, 2006; Westphal, Gulati, & Shortell, 1997; Westphal & Zajac, 1994, 2001; Zajac & Westphal, 2004). Related research has shown that the creation and implementation of adopted practices is affected by the mechanism of diffusion (Weber, Davis, & Lounsbury, 2009).

Consistent with the institutional perspective, homogeneous adoption but inconsistent implementation often leads to inefficient institutional norms. Research detailing decoupling has also examined the power of individual actors, consistent with the increasing importance of individual volition in neo-institutional research (Westphal & Zajac, 2001). Westphal and Zajac detailed how the influence of chief executive officers (CEOs) may impact decoupling within firms (1998, 2001; Zajac and Westphal, 1995). These studies examined CEO power in relation to board of governor influence, finding that powerful actors within organizations may dictate the process and likelihood of decoupling; this variance is connected to the political interests of top managers, who use decoupling to preserve their interests and managerial discretion within the organization. Furthermore, Westphal and Zajac (2001) theorize that the positive results of previous adherence to decoupled practices make it more likely that decoupled practices become encoded into organizational memory and repeated in the future.

#### Individual Actors in Institutional Theory

Previous research which suggests that institutions can be carried for an extended time if there are no sanctions against those who violate the processes (Jepperson, 1991; Zucker, 1977) is particularly disturbing when examining discrimination, as it has been asserted that actors who do not know how to realize their best interests become susceptible to institutional influence (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Drawing on Shibutani (1986), I define institutionalized behaviors as conventionally understood supra-organizational patterns of organizing social life, rooted in socially shared norms. In accordance with most institutional theorists, constituents exerting pressures and expectations that perpetuate the process of institutionalism are found both internally, such as from the state and profession, as well as externally, from interest groups and public opinion (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983; Scott,

1987b; Zucker, 1987). Values that exist both within various organizations and as general societal views, such as discrimination against people with disabilities, may restrict the degree to which people with disabilities are accepted within the organization (Stone & Colella, 1996; Trice & Beyer, 1993).

Societal impressions are embedded within organizations in an institutional environment, especially if the organizational field has existed for an extended period of time. The values of society are embedded within an organization not only due to external pressures to conform, but also from normative influences from constituents within the organization. In this way, normative influences promote isomorphism amongst members within the organization. This occupational socialization is carried out through trade association workshops, educational seminars, peer or mentor networks, and countless other means (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The formal and informal spread of information reinforces commonly recognized hierarchies of status within organizations, controlling informational flows and personnel movement across organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This normative coercion is likely to the detriment of groups which typically have negative stereotypes brandished against them. This negative effect for people with disabilities may arise due to outdated societal beliefs about the capabilities of people with disabilities. Since people with disabilities have often been discriminated against in the past, it is likely that they were not able to benefit fully from original interest structures arising in organizations (Jepperson & Meyer, 1991).

As argued by Granovetter (1985), it is important to remember the importance of individual action embedded in social relations within an organization. The legislation pertinent to people with disabilities within organizations has been sufficiently supported by legislators and appears to be followed by the leaders within most organizations. As noted by Perrow (1976),

however, support from organizational elites does not necessarily result in the ability of these elites to maximize their preferences within the organization. This research implies that actors within the organization have their own beliefs which, if sufficiently institutionalized by external pressures, will not be overridden by loosely required change. This is consistent with both an increase in the importance of organizational actors in modern social systems (Coleman, 1974; Burt, 1975; Zucker, 1983) as well as the previously detailed principles of decoupling at the organizational level. Institutionalized practices, such as discrimination against people with disabilities, will be maintained through normative pressures applied to new actors upon entrance to the organization and will generally be consistently followed by actors within the organization.

Institutional elements are easily transmitted to newcomers, maintained for extended periods of time without further justification or elaboration, and are highly resistant to change (Zucker, 1977, 1987). Institutional elements, such as discrimination, are generated from pressures exerted from forces which are external to the organization (Zucker, 1987). These elements operate independently of the individuals within the organization; even if the individual actors perceive an institutionalized practice as unfair, an individual will still behave as if he/she supports the practice (Zelditch & Walker, 1984; Thomas, Walker, & Zelditch, 1987). This is particularly disturbing for practices such as discrimination, which may be frowned upon in most aspects, but becomes accepted as an institutionalized practice by individuals within an organization. It is, however, possible that modern actors may be able to reify these institutions (Jepperson & Meyer, 1991), allowing for alterations to be made to institutions under certain conditions.

Despite this research, the issue of individuals exerting agency is one that has led to complications in the explanation of institutional theory. Recently, scholars have had a growing

concern for the lack of analysis of the “micro-foundations” of institutional theory (Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Van de Ven & Lifschitz, 2013; Zucker, 1991). This call is not completely new, however; scholars have for quite some time acknowledged a lack of significant research in agency and individual interest, explicitly with the question of how to account for agency (Beckert, 1999, DiMaggio, 1988, DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Fligstein, 1997; Goodrick & Salancik, 1996; Meyer, Boli, & Thomas, 1994; Powell, 1991; Scott, 1991, 1994). It has also been suggested that research be conducted on linkages between internal organizational subunits and the institutions and agencies that define and then support these subunits (Rowan, 1982). It is also important to note that institutionalizations may vary between internal subunits within the postsecondary university, as well as at the level of the individual actor.

While institutional theory may lack in research on individual agents, the notion of the institutional entrepreneur clearly introduces strategic agency into organizational theory (Beckert, 1999). As introduced by DiMaggio (1988), agency within institutional theory can be explained by institutional entrepreneurs. These individual actors have specific interests, and use the resources available to them to influence institutionalized rules through socialization within the organizational field (DiMaggio, 1988). The ability of an institutional entrepreneur to influence their environment will vary greatly depending on many factors. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to theorize on these influencing factors, it seems apparent that any individual within an organization may take an active role in attempting to enhance their interests (Beckert, 1999).

Organizational actors may have varying roles within the organization but it is important to note their potential for supporting their interests within an organization. For example, Cornell University has students, faculty, and administrators, many of whom have previous exposure to the community of people with disabilities. The entrepreneur has the ability to reflect on



institutionalized practices and can envision alternative methods of practice, potentially leading to the process of dis-embedding institutionalized practices if these practices are not in the best interests of the actor (Beckert, 1999).

It is vital for organizations to embrace these organizational actors and encourage them to collaborate and advocate for change within the organization. Fortunately, Cornell University has several subunits which advance the lives of people with disabilities both inside and outside of the classroom. These subunits at Cornell include the world-leading research center on Employment and Disability, the Students with Disabilities Service Office, and faculty members and students with prior exposure to people with disabilities. While these subunits have previously achieved tremendous benefits for people with disabilities, they have all emerged and often acted as separate entities within the organization. This lack of coordination is consistent with the issues detailed by organizational decoupling as detailed by in the institutional lens. Although the community of people with disabilities has previously conducted the majority of their research through the lens of administrative sciences, the research presented below suggests that an institutional approach, supplemented with the advocacy of institutional entrepreneurs or advocate champions could provide the opportunity for new advancements for people with disabilities.

#### Disability in Postsecondary Education and Faculty Members

Educational institutions have been the vehicle for much of the defining literature on organizational theory, and these works have noted the importance of educational organizations for most people (Tolbert & Hall, 2009). Despite this importance, research has shown that educational organizations have yet to overcome institutionalized forms of discrimination against people with disabilities. People with disabilities attend postsecondary education at a lower rate

than people without disabilities (Wehman, 2005) and take longer to graduate than their peers without disabilities (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992). In 2012, 31.7% of people aged 21-64 without a disability had a bachelor's degree or greater as their level of education, compared to only 12.4% of people with a disability (American Community Survey, 2012). Students with disabilities drop out of higher education at a greater rate than students without disabilities (Murray, Goldstein, Nourse & Edgar, 2000) and 9% of students who were identified by their secondary school as having a disability chose not to disclose their disability to their postsecondary university at all (Newman, Wagner, Cameto & Knokey, 2009). It is important to note that these challenges remain despite proven success by students with disabilities. The academic performance of students with disabilities has recently been proven to be more consistent with that of their peers without disabilities than had previously been thought (Stodden, Whelley, Chang, & Harding 2000).

Faculty education was one of the earliest areas identified as being essential to the success of students with disabilities (Jastram, 1979). Education of faculty members on disability issues has been shown to increase their knowledge of disability law, awareness of the impact of disabilities, and willingness to provide accommodations (Bigaj, Shaw & McGuire, 1999; Murray, Lombardi, Wren & Keys, 2009; Sowers & Smith, 2004). One of the many issues relevant to faculty education and classroom climate is the equitable treatment of all students enrolled in any course. Faculty members in postsecondary universities are tasked with creating curricula which convey knowledge to their students in a manner which allows the faculty to grade students on their success in their course. The lack of standardization in course content can cause significant difficulties for students with disabilities, leading to their requests for a legally mandated accommodation. These difficulties are exacerbated when the obstacles faced by

students are primarily the result of a lack of faculty knowledge regarding disability law (Baker et al., 2012). As they displayed, a student who fears negative repercussions when requesting an accommodation from a faculty member may become even more fearful if a faculty member begins questioning the accommodation or the legitimacy of the students' disability; this lack of knowledge may have ramifications even if the faculty member asks the questions without being aware of the consequences of their actions.

The educational environment, particularly inside the classroom, has a large impact on the success a student is able to achieve; the environment is especially crucial for students with disabilities (Hall & Sandler, 1999). The level to which any individual course provides equal opportunity for success, however, may be dependent on the classroom environment and subsequent interactions that the student has with the individual educator. One interesting aspect of the classroom environment is the general autonomy held by faculty members instructing a course. Faculty members generally are allowed almost complete academic freedom within their individual courses. This provides them with the opportunity to control virtually every aspect of the course they instruct. For example, faculty members have traditionally held almost complete autonomy in determining course readings, class structure, and final grading for their courses. Faculty at Cornell recently expressed their discontent towards administrative attempts to include peer reviews as a requirement for tenure. This response clearly displays faculty belief in the importance of upholding academic freedom.

One of the few instances of outside influence on faculty members in the classroom is the legal requirement of reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. Accommodations to students with disabilities, although legally mandated and required, are still an intrusion upon faculty autonomy in the classroom. The alteration of the classroom environment due to a

reasonable accommodation may impact upon the manner in which the faculty member structures their course; this potential for impacting the course results in a dilemma for both faculty and students with disabilities. Faculty members may be forced to concede to outside influences against their will. Although these accommodations are legally required, they may be seen as invasive to faculty members, who may have varying concerns with the accommodation process. Previous research, detailed below, displays the potential for negative consequences when students disclose a disability. The potential for this negative impact may be amplified by discriminatory attitudes towards people with disabilities. Students with disabilities are thus faced with deciding whether or not to ask a faculty member for an accommodation with the knowledge that their request maybe seen as an intrusion. While a student may need an accommodation in order to be successful in the classroom, they also open themselves up to the possibility of skepticism and discrimination when they request an accommodation. The decision involving this request is particularly important because of the autonomy that faculty hold within the classroom.

Reasonable accommodations were meant to provide people with disabilities an equal opportunity to achieve success and overcome discriminatory practices in organizations such as postsecondary universities. Reasonable accommodations in postsecondary universities include alterations to the application process to insure equality in program enrollment, alterations to programs such as training seminars, which enable students to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of the program, and alterations to academic environments so that students with disabilities may perform the essential functions of the program. The accommodations mandated by federal legislation are wide-ranging but somewhat vague. The purpose of the legislation as it relates to

postsecondary universities, however, seems apparent; to provide students with disabilities an equal opportunity to succeed in the academic programs provided by all universities.

Previous research has shown that the intent of the Rehabilitation Act and ADA was to grant equal access to students with disabilities without compromising academic integrity (Vogel, 1990). Appropriate accommodations at the postsecondary level and the acceptance of accommodations by faculty are significant factors in the academic success and retention of students with disabilities (Norton, 1997; Mull, Sitlington, & Alper, 2001; Pierangelo & Crane, 1997; Stodden & Dowrick, 2000; Stodden, Jones, & Chang, 2002). The legislation relevant to the educational experience of students with disabilities was crafted to assist these students in obtaining equality, not an advantage, in areas which are crucial to their success in postsecondary universities.

There are several factors which may prevent relevant legislation from achieving the intended solution of assisting students with disabilities. Organizations are not mandated to provide accommodations which would impose an undue financial or administrative burden if this is the sole barrier to accommodating (ADA, 1990). In addition to this, organizations interpret these guidelines differently, resulting in variations in the accommodations that are provided both in the workplace and in educational organizations (Stodden, Jones, & Chang, 2002). The most important factor in implementing this legislation successfully, however, is likely at a more personal level for both employees and students. If postsecondary universities and faculty members are unwilling to end discriminatory practices, then relevant legislation will not achieve success, and students with disabilities will continue to struggle to achieve equality in postsecondary education.

## Faculty Attitudes and Discrimination in Postsecondary Universities

It is imperative to understand both the background of structural decoupling and the importance of individual actors within organizations when studying the experiences of students with disabilities in postsecondary universities. At the structural level, universities have begun to expand their disability programs by creating new departments to directly oversee the accommodation process for students with disabilities. While this will be discussed in greater detail later, it is important to note that these disability-focused departments were created to prioritize students with disabilities, yet they do not interact with these students on a daily basis. At the individual level, faculty members deal directly with students with disabilities. At many schools, including Cornell, faculty members are provided instructions by the disability-focused department with which they are required to comply. Thus, it is also important to note the experiences of faculty members and students with disabilities in postsecondary education.

Biases such as discrimination may not exist within the disability-focused department, but the existence of discrimination is likely even more detrimental to students with disabilities if it exists amongst individual faculty members. Faculty members usually have a large amount of autonomy in their work, especially in the classroom. Reasonable accommodations are one of the only instances of outside intrusion into the course design for faculty members. While universities are typically loosely coupled organizations because the product they produce, knowledge, is almost impossible to measure, one method of effectively integrating the accommodation process into classrooms may be by tightly-coupling the disability-focused department and faculty subunits. Unfortunately for students with disabilities, it appears as though the collaborative coupling which would serve them best has not been implemented at many universities. This

failure may exacerbate the challenges students with disabilities face in the classroom, explaining the persistence of discrimination in educational organizations.

Even before the ADA and ADAAA were passed, researchers predicted the difficulties that faculty members would face in providing proper accommodations to students with disabilities. As noted by Jastram (1979), “There will probably be no more persistent or difficult problem for faculty members than this question of how far it is reasonable or appropriate to go in waiving specific requirements in order to accommodate a particular student with a disability.” It was impossible, however, for legislators to predict the resulting faculty attitudes. Fortunately, it appears that faculty members generally want to be supportive towards students with disabilities and believe they are supportive (Baggett, 1994; Dodd, Rose, & Belcourt, 1992; Norton, 1997) even if they are unsure of how to best assist students with disabilities. Overall, faculty members have also expressed a willingness to provide various teaching accommodations in their classrooms (e.g., Bourke, Strehorn, & Silver, 2000; Leyser, Vogel, Wyland, & Brulle, 1998; Matthews, Anderson & Solnick, 1987).

Despite the efforts made to insure that relevant legislation only provided students with disabilities the opportunity for equality, as opposed to a competitive advantage, discrimination still exists in postsecondary universities. While legislation can alter the legal mandates for postsecondary universities, it cannot immediately change the perceptions, beliefs, and past experiences held by faculty members. Previous research suggests that discriminatory attitudes and assumptions about the abilities of people with disabilities act as the primary barrier to people with disabilities in their transition from postsecondary education to employment (Dowrick, Anderson, Heyer, & Acosta, 2005). As noted at the beginning of this paper, this discrimination may be either conscious or unintentional and is generally consistent with cultural assumptions

held by society regarding the capabilities of people with disabilities; regardless of intent, however, discriminatory practices can impact students with disabilities on a daily basis. Rectifying the discriminatory practices of faculty members is extremely important due to the role of faculty in shaping the classroom environment and determining the academic success of students enrolled in postsecondary universities.

One example of faculty beliefs hindering students with disabilities relates to the faculty members' perceptions of ability for students with disabilities. Faculty beliefs regarding supporting students with disabilities may actually lead to lower perceptions for the academic expectations of these students and uncomfortable encounters. In general, faculty members have been found to be less comfortable with students with disabilities and to have lower academic expectations for these students than for students without disabilities (Houck, Asselin, Troutman, & Arrington, 1992; Leyser, 1989). These low expectations act as a barrier to success and have been shown to lead to a higher likelihood of low student performance (Dowrick et al., 2005).

Despite the attempts at a positive outlook towards students with disabilities, faculty members may be concerned that accommodations lower academic integrity for the overall classroom climate (Dodd, et al., 1992; Matthews et al., 1987; Houck, et al., 1992; Nelson, Dodd, & Smith, 1990; Nelson, Smith, & Dodd, 1991). As stated by Scott (1997), "Surveys of faculty attitudes reveal that the large majority of faculty members are willing to accommodate students with learning disabilities but struggle with ethical concerns in balancing the rights of students with learning disabilities with the academic integrity of the course, program of study, and institution." These concerns are due primarily to worries that providing certain accommodations may be unfair to students who do not have disabilities (Vasek, 2005). The classroom climate is further compromised for students with disabilities when the obstacles they face in the



accommodations process are the result of a lack of faculty knowledge regarding relevant legislation. Faculty members feel as though it is important to gain a greater understanding of the legal mandates relating to disabilities and believe that they do not collectively understand the general tenants of relevant laws (Cook, Rumrill, & Tankersley, 2009).

Past research demonstrates a strong relationship between faculty members' knowledge of the laws regarding accommodations and their willingness to provide accommodations (Rao & Gartin, 2003). Unfortunately for students with disabilities, postsecondary faculty members have been shown to have very limited knowledge regarding accommodating students with disabilities (Rao, 2002; Villarreal, 2002; Wilson, Getzel, & Brown, 2000) and disability law in general (Benham, 1997; Dona & Edminster, 2001; Thompson, Bethea, & Turner, 1997). In fact, research has shown on multiple occasions that 50% or more of the faculty members and administrators at a given postsecondary university were unfamiliar with the relevant legislation pertaining to students with disabilities (Baggett, 1994; Vasek, 2005). Although knowledge of relevant legislation has been shown to be important, blind compliance of laws pertaining to people with disabilities is also not optimal; instead, disability advocates have begun to push for the inclusion of people with disabilities into the general society.

While faculty lack of knowledge likely facilitates issues between faculty members and students with disabilities, it is also likely that these issues are impacted by direct contact and stereotypes held about relationships with people with disabilities in general. Faculty members and students with disabilities often have difficulty in creating and maintaining the bonds necessary to provide ample support for students with disabilities (Graff, 1999). Fichten and Goodrick (1990) revealed that professors tend to prefer students who approach them directly and engage in dialogue. Norton (1997), however, found that students with disabilities were not

comfortable approaching faculty members to request accommodations. Furthermore, research has shown that students with disabilities are less likely than their peers without disabilities to seek help from professors when special considerations may be needed and often only reach out to professors as a last resort (Fichten & Goodrick, 1990).

It is possible that people with disabilities may feel uncomfortable if they must immediately disclose that they have a disability when requesting an accommodation. This immediate disclosure may activate a lasting negative stereotype threat for students or workers with disabilities (May & Stone, 2010). It is also possible that some students with disabilities are uncomfortable establishing relationships with faculty for reasons beyond their control. Some disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorders, are known for causing difficulties with social interactions. Hartman-Hall and Haaga (2002) also found that undergraduates who viewed their disability as more stigmatizing were less likely to report a willingness to seek help in response to negative situations. Faculty may also have negative recollections of past interactions with students with disabilities, and subconsciously use these recollections as confirmation of their discriminatory views, even if these interactions are not indicative of the capabilities of students with disabilities as a population.

As noted earlier, establishing relationships with faculty is critical to the success of students with disabilities but these ties may be difficult to establish due to discriminatory views. Faculty who lack a basic understanding of disabilities may believe that students with disabilities are trying to take advantage of or cheat the system (Williams & Ceci, 1999). It is well documented that faculty members are skeptical of student needs for accommodations, especially for invisible, or cognitive, disabilities (Leyser, et al., 1998; Jensen, McCrary, Krampe, & Cooper, 2004; Kurth & Mellard, 2006; Perry & Franklin, 2006; Wilson et al., 2000). In this framework

for interactions, if some students' requests for accommodations seem devious, then all requests may be suspect; this perpetuates a relationship which is unproductive at best and adversarial at worst (Jensen et al., 2004).

The impact of perceived discrimination from faculty members may have a lasting effect on students with disabilities. Negative interactions with faculty have led students to withhold from disclosing their disability in future classes, even if it meant that they would not be able to receive the accommodations that they needed, ultimately leading to consistently lower grades (Madaus, Scott, & McGuire, 2003). Previous research has clearly demonstrated that people with disabilities face significant obstacles in obtaining equality in both employment and education despite legislation intended to insure equality. At the postsecondary level, it is obvious that students with disabilities may face issues when interacting with faculty members; this conclusion reinforces the importance of examining the interactions between these groups and providing practical enhancements for these interactions, at both the individual and organizational level, in the future.

#### Accommodations and Employment

One of the major focuses of the previously discussed legislation was insuring equality for workers with disabilities. This legislation was meant to assist people with disabilities throughout the employment process, with an emphasis on overcoming challenges in their attempts to gain and maintain employment. Almost 20% of all employers and over 50% of large companies (those employing more than 250 employees) knowingly employ at least one person with a disability (Domzal, Houtenville, & Sharma, 2008). Despite this, the employment rate among the 19 million working-age people with disabilities in the United States is only 35.5%, which is less

than half the 76.3% rate for people without disabilities (Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2014). Furthermore, among the 11 million unemployed working-age people with disabilities, 80% want to work now or in the future, and over 1.6 million have college degrees (Ali, Schur, & Blanck, 2011; Kruse, Schur, & Ali, 2010).

These statistics are made more disturbing when the specific occupations are considered, as people with disabilities have historically been employed in part-time, low-status jobs which offer small opportunities for career advancement and significantly less income (Barnes & Mercer, 2005; Braddock & Bachelder, 1994; Goldstone & Meager, 2002). In the United States 52% of workers with disabilities earned less than \$25,000, compared to 38% of workers without disabilities; this earning gap translates to workers with disabilities earning approximately 75% of what workers without disabilities earn (United States Census Bureau, 2010). Discrepancies in opportunities for upward mobility within organizations exist despite often equivalent educational levels and years of experience for workers with and without disabilities (Hyde, 1998; Jones, 1997). Even when opportunities for advancement do present themselves to workers with disabilities, the opportunities are usually associated with more risk or instability (Wilson-Kovacs, Ryan, Haslam, & Rabinovich, 2008).

Previous research on workers with disabilities has shown both relative success and inexpensive costs. In fact, workers with disabilities have been shown to not have higher absenteeism or turnover rates than workers without disabilities and have performed as well if not better than their peers without disabilities (Greenwood & Johnson, 1987). Despite this, employers are more likely to question the work ethic of workers with disabilities and their aspirations for career advancement while believing workers with disabilities are more prone to

absenteeism, less committed to their work, and less capable of getting along with their co-workers, relative to workers with disabilities (Cunningham, James, & Dibben, 2004).

People with disabilities comprise a population which has been overlooked despite potential benefits. One of the primary reasons for this oversight is the employer concern that this untapped labor source is too expensive to recruit applicants from (Stevens, 2002). Despite the potential for needing to provide reasonable accommodations, workers with disabilities have repeatedly proven their competence in the workplace at a low monetary cost (Schartz, Hendricks, & Blanck, 2006). Research has shown that accommodations provided by workplace organizations are relatively inexpensive; 50% of accommodations cost less than \$50, and 69% of accommodations cost less than \$500 (Braddock & Bachelder, 1994). Bruyere (2000) has reported that cost is now not necessarily perceived as a barrier to providing accommodations in the private sector. The relevant research on accommodations provides an important background for inequality in the workplace, but there seem to be stronger factors influencing continued discrimination and the appropriate management of people with disabilities in the workplace.

Some organizations have been more successful than others at integrating workers with disabilities into their workforce. In fact, 34% of large firms actively recruit applicants with disabilities (Domzal et al., 2008). Accommodations are generally viewed as a valuable asset by human resource managers when the accommodation is seen as a strategic investment which will pay dividends for the organization in the future (Cleveland, Barnes- Farrell, & Ratz, 1997). Research also shows that to the extent that employers and coworkers view accommodation requests as normal or common within a broader culture of flexibility, there may be fewer perceived costs associated with asking for necessary accommodations (Schur et al., in press).

Successful integration has not been fully achieved, however, due in large part to current discriminatory stereotypes and attitudinal biases (Lengnick- Hall, Gaunt, & Kulkarni, 2008; Braddock & Bachelder, 1994). As Stone and Colella assert, stereotypes are used as the basis for observer's expectancies of workers with disabilities and peers may judge workers with disabilities in comparison to what they view as the prototypical employee for any given job (1996). These perceptions of people with disabilities are heavily biased and not entirely accurate, yet they significantly shape our views about workers with disabilities (Stone & Colella, 1996). Unfortunately, people with disabilities continue to face negative attitudes or perceptions from within organizations (e.g., Hebl & Skorinko, 2005; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007; Wang, Barron, & Hebl, 2010).

It is essential to gain a further understanding of social factors relating to perception and discrimination, as past research has shown that social values and perceptions influence the willingness of an employer to provide an accommodation (Campbell, 1985). Coworker reactions are important to note, as it has been shown that people with disabilities consider these social reactions and potential consequences when requesting an accommodation (Baldrige & Veiga, 2006; Baldrige & Veiga, 2001; Schur et al., in press). Employers are also especially hesitant to provide accommodations if they believe that co-workers will view workers who receive an accommodation as being singled-out and over-rewarded (Cleveland, Barnes-Farrell, & Huestis, 1996). With respect to monetary cost, more expensive and more imposing accommodations can be expected to be seen as less fair by coworkers, increasing the perceived social cost for the requester (Colella, 2001).

Workers with disabilities who have been given the opportunity to work have clearly been successful enough to warrant concern over the large continued disparity in recent employment

rates. Demonstrated past success, in addition to changing cultural norms, may provide some people with disabilities, such as people on the autism spectrum, with a large advantage in the workplace (Cowen, 2009). The literature has already noted for quite some time that the increasingly diverse composition of the American workforce will be accompanied by similarly diverse needs and expectations of workers (Offerman & Gowing, 1990) and new opportunities for employers (Herzog, 2010).

In the present, however, little is still truly certain about the experiences of people with disabilities in work organizations (Colella & Bruyere, 2011). Successful implementation of both diversity and disability-focused initiatives require more than legislation; it requires efforts to change corporate culture and attitudes (Herzog, 2010). As such, discrimination against people with disabilities is still very present in work organizations, though research suggests that there may be hope for improvement in the future.

### Research Aims

This research aims to fulfill three primary goals. First, this paper uses qualitative and quantitative data to illustrate decoupling in postsecondary universities. Decoupling has likely arisen due to recent legislation which has enacted significant changes on the educational system. While this legislation was intended to provide equality for people with disabilities in organizations, institutionalized norms, specifically discrimination against people with disabilities, may restrict the effectiveness of the legislation. Following the lead of Westphal and Zajac (2001), this research views decoupling as a repeated process which has become institutionalized within an organization over time. Furthermore, this decoupling may result in varying responses throughout the organization.

Next, this paper provides qualitative data detailing the experiences of students with disabilities in postsecondary education. It is essential to understand the experiences of people with disabilities in order to improve future efforts for equality within organizations. As argued by several educational researchers in the past, the best method of fully understanding the experiences of students with disabilities involves focusing on the voices of the students themselves (Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2006; Seidman, 2006). Despite this viewpoint, surprisingly little qualitative research has examined the experiences of students with disabilities in postsecondary education. Furthermore, almost no qualitative research has examined these experiences since the enactment of the ADAAA in 2008. This legislation is instrumental to the experiences of current students with disabilities in postsecondary education, and this research seeks to obtain data from students now that sufficient time has elapsed for students and faculty to adjust to the ADAAA.

Sociologists have also noted the importance of conducting direct research on the experiences of people with disabilities. Most notably, Schneider and Conrad (1983) examined the experiences of people who regularly suffered from seizures, with an emphasis on detailing how these people viewed themselves as members of society. Despite the importance of recording the experiences of people with disabilities from the viewpoint of these people themselves, most sociological research is adopted from the view of an outside researcher with their own views on what disability is and how it should be studied (Schneider & Conrad, 1983). As Schneider and Conrad (1983) state, “We cannot understand illness by studying disease alone... (illness) is primarily about social meaning, experiences, relationships, and conduct that exist around putative disease.” While the language used in their work may be dated, the message remains important to advocates for people with disabilities today- we need to have input from people



with disabilities themselves in order to best understand their experiences and end discriminatory practices.

Finally, this paper concludes by providing practical suggestions for improvements at Cornell University. These improvements will be realistic implementations relating to administrators, faculty, and students with disabilities at Cornell University. It is hoped that these suggestions will aid future students with disabilities, particularly by improving future interactions with the employees of Cornell.

## Method

### Research Setting

All of the data for this research were obtained from one private postsecondary university, Cornell University. Cornell University was founded in 1865 by Ezra Cornell and Andrew Dickinson White and is a private Ivy League research university. The primary campus is located in Ithaca, New York, a rural region in northern New York State. Cornell has several characteristics that make it a rare postsecondary education; these characteristics may have significant impacts upon the lives of students with disabilities, making them important to discuss before the research findings are provided.

Cornell University had approximately 21,500 students, approximately 14,000 of whom were undergraduates enrolled for the 2013-2014 academic year (Cornell University, 2014b). Students enrolled in postsecondary education programs deal with stress due to factors such as their personal life, academics, and other extracurricular commitments; these difficulties can be even further exacerbated for students with disabilities. Adding to this stress, Cornell is often considered one of the most stressful schools in the United States (Werley, 2012). As has already

been noted earlier, faculty relations with students with disabilities are incredibly important predictors of success at the postsecondary level. While Cornell is a prestigious school, some students may decide to attend smaller universities where they can receive more direct attention with faculty members. This is likely particularly true for students with disabilities.

A final factor that should be noted specifically about Cornell is the geography of the campus and the surrounding area of Ithaca. The central campus of Cornell is located on a steep hill making it difficult for students with physical mobility issues to navigate. While the campus is for the most part accessible, attending Cornell is very difficult for students with physical disabilities affecting mobility simply because of the physical terrain. In addition to this, Cornell is also known for cold winters full of snow and ice, making mobility even more difficult for students with disabilities. While it is difficult to fault Cornell for these issues, they are nonetheless important to note, as these factors likely result in the disability population at Cornell having a greater percentage of students with mental or invisible disabilities as opposed to physical or mobility-related disabilities. This prevalence of invisible disabilities may not be as significantly pronounced in other postsecondary universities, but this majority actually serves to more effectively demonstrate several of the issues which are relevant to this study.

The staff members tasked with handling the majority of administrative affairs relating to students with disabilities are affiliated with the Student Disability Services Office (SDS). SDS was created to work specifically with students with disabilities at Cornell and serve as a resource for faculty members or other Cornell staff with questions regarding students with disabilities. For the 2014 academic year there were ten staff members employed by SDS, five of whom specialized in captioning materials for the use of students with visual or hearing disabilities. The

staff at SDS seems to be competent and committed to advocating for the best interest of students with disabilities.

The majority of direct interactions between the over 800 students who use the services offered by SDS and the staff are handled directly by two staff directors. One of the directors graduated from the Cornell undergraduate program before pursuing a Master's degree in Social Work. Upon graduating with her Master's, she spent over twenty years advising students in the College of Engineering at Cornell before starting with SDS. The other director previously worked as a special education teacher before serving as the Director for Disability Services at Ohio University. These two staff directors have assisted students with disabilities throughout their tenure as enrolled students at Cornell for a combined period of over twenty years. While these directors have an extensive background in working with students with disabilities, a workload of 400 students each makes it seem as though their office is understaffed.

The staff directors have a great deal of responsibility for the disability community at Cornell. Their position requires them to review the legitimacy of documented disabilities, arrange reasonable classroom accommodations with students, educate the Cornell community about varying disabilities, and generally serve as a resource for all those who are either affiliated with the disability community at Cornell or who may have questions regarding disabilities. Disability statuses are validated through a process defined by the previously detailed legislation. Documentation of a disability status at Cornell is only verified when a licensed or credentialed examiner provides the diagnosis, a diagnostic statement identifying the disability (note that a condition does not automatically qualify as a disability) is included, and a rationale and justification for all requested accommodations has been provided by the examiner. Furthermore, the student must also provide a description of the diagnostic methodology, a description of the

current functional limitations, and a description of the expected duration and progression of the condition (Cornell University, 2014c).

Consistent with past theory on institutional isomorphism, SDS was created by Cornell in 1999 to serve as a visible structure of compliance to accepted norms. In this instance, SDS, which had previously been affiliated with the Office of Equal Opportunity, signaled the willingness of the university to allocate sufficient resources to students with disabilities who wished to enroll in courses (Cornell University, 2014a). The creation of an independent unit for student needs served as a clear indication of conformity to societal and political views which, at that time, were aligning with the social model of disability. The strategic response implemented by Cornell was similar to that of other leading universities signaling alignment with societal expectations. SDS continues to strive to ensure equality for students with disabilities and has had success, making it comparable to disability service centers at other leading universities.

Although SDS has provided helpful assistance for many in the Cornell community, the failure to consider the organizational culture already present within the university has resulted in a prolonged limiting of the effectiveness of the office, often at the expense of students with disabilities. Specifically, while SDS is intended to serve as a resource for faculty members, it is often under-utilized because faculty members are not mandated to attend training sessions from SDS staff. Faculty members may not interact with students with disabilities frequently, or at all, for any given class, which may discourage them from these sessions and make the faculty more inclined to attend training sessions which are more likely to have a definite impact on their classroom. The SDS staff provide information detailing the accommodation process to faculty members via emails, are available to answer faculty questions regarding students with disabilities, and sponsor events relevant to students with disabilities throughout the year;

unfortunately, however, these resources go completely unused by many faculty members at Cornell. Furthermore, the anonymous nature of disability statuses may immediately create the illusion of distrust for faculty members who lack an understanding of how SDS operates.

#### Data Collection through Symbolic Interactionism

Following the qualitative approach suggested by Denzin (1989) and Denzin and Lincoln (2003), the information used for this work were obtained from multiple methods. This method of symbolic interactionism is the most effective way to fully record the emergent relationships that may be observed by researchers (Denzin, 1989). To fully immerse myself in the culture, I attempted to employ multiple methods of participant observation for students with disabilities and faculty members. As suggested by Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest (1966), no single method would have permitted me to fully understand the existent culture. Thus, I adopted a triangulation method of observation, utilizing three manners of sociological data collection. These three methods were participant observation, life history and historical method, and a distributed survey.

The first method of data collection was a survey distributed to faculty members. This survey collected qualitative and quantitative data from faculty in three of the schools within Cornell. The survey questions were meant to be exploratory in nature, providing a focus for the results section. The qualitative data collection included open-ended questions allowing for a free response from the participant; several of these questions requested data from faculty members which detailed previous experiences with students with disabilities. These questions allowed for the second method of data collection, the detailing of participant life history and historical experiences. Furthermore, I interviewed many faculty members affiliated with Cornell which

provided me with additional information to complement the data obtained from the faculty survey.

The final method implemented in the triangulation of data collection was participant observation. Participant observation and informal conversation complemented the data obtained through interviews by providing additional insight into how students with disabilities experienced the educational culture at Cornell. While conducting the research, I served as the teaching assistant for thirteen courses, the majority of which related to disability studies. These courses were offered through the Employment and Disability Institute and their relation to disability studies naturally led to significant interest and enrollment from students with disabilities. These students made several requests for accommodations and, when practical, I personally facilitated the accommodations for these students. This allowed for additional knowledge to supplement the interviews via direct exposure to exchanges that defined the experiences had by students with disabilities (Balogun & Johnson, 2005), which aided in the understanding of the social situations in which students and faculty regularly interact (Goffman, 1961).

I also met with several administrators from Cornell who worked with students with disabilities. The role of these administrators ranged from the Vice- President of Student and Academic Services and the director of diversity programming for Cornell to the directors of Student Disability Services for the University. I also met with the appointed “school-disability representative” for each school or college which surveyed faculty members. These representatives were meant to serve as a liaison between the staff providing services to students with disabilities and staff within each school.

The multiple methods of data collection allowed me to fully immerse myself in the culture for students with disabilities at Cornell. By examining the experiences of these students from a triangulated method, I was able to glean rich data from both students and the faculty members who interacted with these students on a regular basis. Furthermore, I was able to meet with administrators who created policies which regulated the interactions between students and faculty members. This complete perspective was consistent with the suggestions for optimal qualitative research as suggested by symbolic interactionism (Denzin, 1989).

### Interview Participants

In this part of the study, the goal was to obtain in-depth qualitative data from students with disabilities at Cornell University. First, it is important to note that many people with disabilities are reluctant to disclose their disability. The reluctance to disclose a disability is prevalent in varying organizations and has created sample size issues for researchers in every field examining people with disabilities. This reluctance is likely due to their fears of being discriminated against, but pursuing this idea is outside the scope of this paper.

Interviews were conducted with ten students with disabilities from Cornell University. This number of students is consistent with past qualitative research on students with disabilities in postsecondary universities (Bento, 1996; Holloway, 2001; Orr & Goodman, 2010; Quinlan, Bates, & Angell, 2012; Skinner, 2004). These students were interviewed on-campus, with one exception being a student who was studying abroad at the time of contact. This student was contacted via email and was asked to fill out the questions and reply via email; this participant was also encouraged to include any experiences they felt would be relevant to their experience as a student with a disability, even if it was not directly related to a listed question. All students

were undergraduates, except for one Cornell undergraduate alumna who had graduated several months before the interview and at the time was working for Cornell.

The primary method of recruitment for this research was through an email which was sent to disability-related organizations affiliated with Cornell. This email asked for students with disabilities to volunteer for interviews regarding their experiences at Cornell. Participants were also recruited by the principal investigator from a brief presentation at the beginning of several university classes which focused on disability-related issues. After each interview, participants were asked to pass on the contact information of the principal investigator to other students with disabilities. Thus, participants for this research were originally recruited by the principal investigator before the recruitment relied on a snowball effect of recruitment (Morgan, 2008).

Disability is a broad term which can be applied in many different manners. This research is meant to apply to a broad definition of disability, including people with varying cognitive and physical conditions. This definition follows the definition of students whom Cornell University considers to have a disability. As stated in the Cornell literature, disability encompasses a wide range of conditions including sensory, cognitive, physical, psychological and medical conditions. Cornell also notes that every student with a disability is unique, even if students have a similar medical diagnosis. While participants with disabilities were not explicitly asked to reveal their disabilities, several revealed their disabilities to the principal investigator; these participants had a variety of both physical and cognitive disabilities.

Although including multiple disability groups within the same study may lead to confounding results (Florey & Harrison, 2000), I believe that including all students with disabilities is appropriate for this research for several reasons. First, this research is meant to



build theory relating towards people with disabilities in general; thus, the confounding issues that may arise in empirical examinations of multiple disabilities groups can, for the most part, be avoided. Next, the difficulty in recruiting participants for this research would have precluded a more restricting definition of disability. As noted earlier, students with disabilities may be concerned about disclosing their disability to a researcher, even if their accounts remain anonymous. Finally, as detailed earlier, Cornell University has several characteristics that inadvertently narrow the disability population. These characteristics are generally beyond the control of the university administrators, but they do impact the students who chose to enroll at Cornell.

#### Interview Procedures

Participants arranged interviews with the principal investigator at the location and time of their choosing. Interviews lasted from approximately twenty to seventy-five minutes. The interviews all included standard questions addressing three main aspects of the lives of students at Cornell: daily student life in general, interactions with Cornell faculty members, and experiences with Cornell administrators. While these three sections were discussed with every participant, interviews were conducted using a semi-structured method. Students were encouraged to answer questions in whatever manner they thought would best convey their experience as a student with a disability; this led to additional questions for most students and further detail on the aspects that these students found most important and relevant.

The principal investigator took brief notes during the interview but also recorded interviews on a laptop computer. The laptop was minimally used during the interview so as to insure the participants would feel comfortable discussing their experiences. In a further effort to

sure participant comfort, students were not asked to confirm their disability status. There are three reasons why this confirmation was unnecessary. First, the previously discussed hesitation for many students to disclose their disability was perceived to make it unlikely that any student falsifying their status to claim that they had a disability. Next, there was no compensation for individuals consenting to be interviewed. Finally, while participants were not required to disclose their disability, all participants acknowledged having a disability at some point during the interview.

I analyzed my interview data using a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001). I first read through all of the comments from student interviews and then sorted the comments into an emergent set of topical categories. This method was implemented so as to avoid researcher bias which otherwise may have resulted from knowledge of information which had previously been collected from other data collection methods (Denzin, 1989). After multiple iterations of reviewing the transcribed interviews, I sorted relevant comments into broad categories detailing the experiences of students with disabilities at Cornell.

### Survey Participants

In this part of the study, faculty members were surveyed in order to provide quantitative as well as qualitative data. This survey was intended to complement the information provided by students and allow for a clear depiction of how faculty members viewed their experiences with students with disabilities. In total, the faculty members surveyed represented six of the seven schools within Cornell. Although the survey was only sent directly to faculty members in three of the seven schools within Cornell, many professors have multiple affiliations which provided for a broad range of participant experiences.

A total of 162 faculty members at Cornell responded to the survey. It is impossible to determine the exact amount of faculty members who received the survey because the survey was not sent to respondents directly by the principal investigators. While it is possible to determine a close estimate by calculating the faculty members affiliated with each department, administrators who sent the survey had control over exactly which faculty members were sent the survey. Administrators were asked to contact all faculty members but may have included faculty who are affiliated with their department as adjunct professors but not listed in publically available databases. Although it is highly unlikely that this resulted in a significant change in the target population, it is impossible to be completely certain of who administrators considered faculty members for the purposes of this study. While it is difficult to determine the exact number of faculty members who were sent the survey, it is estimated that the response rate was approximately 25%; this response rate is consistent with previous studies involving university faculty and disability awareness (Bourke et al., 2000; Leyser et al., 1998; Lombardi & Murray, 2011; Murray, Wren, & Keys, 2008; Vogel, Holt, Sligar, & Leake, 2008).

Survey participants were recruited via an email with a link to an online survey sent to faculty members affiliated with three of the schools and colleges seven within Cornell. These three, the School of Industrial and Labor Relations, the School of Hotel Administration, and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, all allowed various methods through which faculty members could be contacted. The School of Industrial and Labor Relations sent an email to faculty members with a message of endorsement from the thesis committee members (all three of whom had affiliations with this School), the Assistant Dean, the faculty member directing the Committee for Teaching Excellence within the school, and the Director of Student Services. The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences sent the same email from the administrative assistant of

the College Dean. Although the School of Hotel Administration refused to send out the email, the assistant dean of the School directed recruitment efforts to a listing of the full listing of affiliated faculty members and gave permission for the principal investigator to contact the faculty members directly. Although faculty members were encouraged to complete the survey, they were also assured that their responses would remain completely anonymous, so it is unlikely that they felt significant pressure to respond to the email. All three schools sent a follow-up email regarding the survey two weeks after they were originally contacted.

Participants showed a wide variation in their demographic information, with the exception of race/ethnicity identification. There was a wide distribution of respondent age and position rank within the university and both genders were well represented. It is interesting to note that 88% of respondents to the survey, a large majority, identified themselves as primarily Caucasian. While it is interesting to note this figure, race was not mentioned in any of the qualitative faculty responses nor the student interviews; thus, it appears safe to assume that this response rate figure did not skew the research findings.

#### Faculty Survey Procedure

Respondents answered an online survey administered via the Cornell Qualtrics program. This survey asked fourteen questions regarding faculty experiences with students with disabilities followed by five questions concerning respondent demographic information. The fourteen questions included three response methods. The majority of survey questions used the semantic differential scale developed by Osgood and associates (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957), asking respondents to rate concepts on a series of bipolar adjectives using various seven-point scales. Two yes or no multiple choice questions were asked near the beginning of the

survey asking faculty members if they had received training from either Cornell or another employer on working with students with disabilities. Three questions, two of which were asked directly before the demographic questions, allowed for open-ended responses to questions regarding faculty experiences with students with disabilities and suggestions for future improvements.

The survey questions were developed in collaboration with two administrators from the Cornell Office of Student Disability Services and several faculty members. Quantitative questions were also drawn from a previous survey on students with disabilities at the postsecondary level (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth & Workforce Strategy Center, 2009). Questions were designed so as to limit the potential for socially desirable responding by participants. Socially desirable responding, or “presenting oneself favorably regarding current norms and standards,” was limited by generalizing questions to ask about faculty members in general as opposed to direct, intimate faculty experiences (Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987). The issue of attempting to respond in a socially desirable manner is relevant to research involving meta-stereotyped groups, including many of the faculty members examined in this disability research (Vorauer, Main, & O’Connell, 1998), but was controlled by using suggestions from prior researchers and insuring anonymous responses.

## Research Findings

### Discrimination and Postsecondary Education

Faculty members, like any somewhat diverse population, have varying viewpoints regarding students with disabilities. The results of this research divided faculty into two overarching categories. The first group has had generally positive reactions when asked about

SDS. These faculty members have usually had to reach out to contact the staff members at SDS. While the support has not always been optimal, these faculty members generally appear to be content with the advice that they received from SDS. The second group had a less positive viewpoint toward SDS at Cornell. These faculty members seem to have more limited, if any, experience with SDS. This lack of interaction has led to issues in establishing trust in the accommodation process, and questions surrounding SDS expertise and the impact that accommodations have on classroom equality. Faculty who have more negative perceptions of SDS are more likely to engage in strained interactions with students with disabilities, leading to negative consequences for students who are merely requesting their legally mandated reasonable accommodations.

It is clear that previous results have presented empirical support of the assertion that people with disabilities face discriminatory practices in varying organizations. In postsecondary education people with disabilities face prejudicial behaviors, as evidenced by qualitative responses by both faculty and the students themselves. As noted earlier, the findings from this research apply primarily to invisible disabilities, which are more common at Cornell University. This is important to note, as the discrimination discussed in this article applies to disabilities which may not be physically apparent. This discrimination has persisted despite people with disabilities having proven their competence in varying organizations in part because of the shifting of societal viewpoints. Discrimination against people with disabilities, however, may have progressed at a different rate than that of other forms of discrimination because of the unique concerns associated with this population.

While often included in the diversity stream for both research and educational purposes, people with disabilities are clearly delineated from other minority groups in prejudicial beliefs.

One faculty member illustrated the differences between people with disabilities and other minority groups with the following quote: “Common on campus are the following: students who need accommodations are offered makeup exams instead of the regular test. Imagine if I said "every Hispanic student takes the makeup instead" -- all h\*ll would break loose.” Students with disabilities clearly face a separate set of obstacles from other groups which encounter discrimination. The discrimination that students with disabilities face is similarly accompanied by different concerns and questions.

The faculty members who have less positive perceptions of SDS may hold these beliefs because of the loose coupling within the organization. If SDS is understaffed and unable to effectively reach out to faculty members it is apparent that some faculty members will not take the initiative to reach out to SDS on their own. Since the responses to this research were submitted anonymously, it is impossible to determine how other factors may have influenced the qualitative responses provided by faculty members. While it is difficult to assign fault for this lack of coordination, the loose organizational coupling between the SDS staff and faculty members has significant effects upon all parties involved in the accommodation process.

The qualitative data obtained from both the interviews and survey resulted in four overarching themes pertaining to discriminatory practices. These themes addressed 1) faculty skepticism of the legitimacy of various disabilities, 2) faculty concerns for fairness in the academic classroom, 3) student fears for negative repercussions from requests and 4) faculty belief that some students are attempting to take advantage of their disability diagnosis. These themes emerged from the survey responses and were confirmed by participants during their interviews and by the principal investigator while working with students with disabilities and faculty members in varying capacities. It is important to note that these themes are all relevant to

interactions between faculty members and students with disabilities. Within this context, students with disabilities must balance disclosing their disability status and receiving a necessary accommodation with the potential for negative consequences from faculty members experiencing an intrusion upon their academic freedom within the classroom.

While other issues were raised by faculty members, these four themes address the majority of the concerns raised by faculty members and simultaneously present qualitative data establishing discrimination against students with disabilities. These concerns will also be contrasted with data obtained from interviews with students with disabilities in order to highlight the contrast between how faculty members approach these issues and how students view their interactions with faculty members. Thus, qualitative data from multiple sources are integrated together to frame a complete and accurate depiction of the experiences of students and faculty members at Cornell.

#### Faculty Skepticism of Disability Legitimacy

One of the most common concerns for faculty members interacting with students with disabilities is the legitimacy of the disability. When students with disabilities arrive at Cornell they provide medical documentation for their disability to the staff at the SDS office. The staff members at SDS verify the medical documentation provided by all students and strictly monitor which students provide documentation in order to insure that accommodations are provided only to students who have a diagnosis requiring a form of assistance. The verification of disability status is a process which does not involve the faculty members in any way. Several faculty members informally noted that they have little idea how this process works at all. It is important to note that skepticism from faculty members seems to arise from their questioning of the



validity of the social model of viewing disability, as opposed to discrimination which had previously arisen under the medical model of viewing disability.

While faculty members may not have expertise in diagnosing disabilities, it is likely that they would like clarification on the process as it may result in them having to make significant courses alteration. The time-consuming efforts on the part of faculty members should be particularly frustrating since faculty may not understand the importance of the accommodation process for individual students with disabilities. Instead of a collaborative accommodation process, students with disabilities meet with the SDS staff to arrange an accommodation and then faculty members simply receive a notice of the required accommodations which they must implement.

As noted earlier, while the staff members at SDS do not personally diagnose students, all students who receive accommodations must verify their disability with medical documentation (Cornell University, 2014c). One student even commented on how SDS did not immediately agree to provide an accommodation until further documentation was provided. This student noted that the staff members at SDS were extremely thorough, overly so in the opinion of the student, in insuring that the disability was permanent and continued to monitor the student closely throughout their time at Cornell. Another faculty member described a situation when they believed a student in their class had a disability and had to spend a great deal of time convincing SDS to provide help for the student. Faculty members should be confident that all students who receive accommodations do have legitimate disabilities which require a form of accommodation; this confidence is not always held, however, due to a lack of transparency between SDS and the faculty members.

The lack of transparency between SDS and faculty members during the accommodation process is due to the loose coupling between the organizational subunits. If faculty members were aware of the stringent measures used to diagnose a disability status for students, it is likely that they would be less skeptical of student disability diagnoses. This decreasing skepticism would encourage faculty to be more comfortable with allowing accommodations in the classroom, as the accommodations would be seen as more of a necessity for individual students, and less of an intrusion upon academic freedom from an outside source. Currently, faculty members have limited interaction with SDS, often receiving only a note from students which mandates additional time on examinations. One faculty member described SDS as a “distant actor.” While this accommodation may be reasonable and legally mandated, the current accommodation process appears to fail in convincing faculty members of the legitimacy of varying disability statuses.

Despite the stringent measures necessary to obtain an accommodation, faculty members still appear hesitant to provide accommodations. This may be due to skepticism regarding the severity of a disability. This skepticism is prominent primarily in cases where the disability is not visibly apparent. These types of disabilities, known as invisible or cognitive disabilities, often include learning disorders and impairments which can range from ADHD to Autism spectrum disorders or dyslexia. Students are aware that some faculty members may have greater reservations for providing accommodations for these types of disabilities. One student remarked, “People see disability as someone in a wheelchair, someone with a crutch, but I don’t think that they see it as other types of disabilities so much.” Another student added that Cornell could foster acceptance of students with disabilities by “changing the perception that if you can’t see a disability then it doesn’t exist or that they’re cheating and it is a negative thing.”

Faculty members openly expressed their skepticism in responses to the free response survey questions. One faculty member remarked, “I think this category of ‘disabilities’ is too broad. I haven’t taught anyone who is blind. I teach a million students with ADHD who get twice as long as other students.” This logic represents a serious issue for students with cognitive disabilities.

An invisible disability, such as dyslexia, is likely difficult to identify with the naked eye than a visible disability. This difficulty may increase the difficulty in determining an appropriate accommodation. While students with eyesight-related disabilities may have difficulties with physical barriers, it is likely that they can perform equally well as a student without a disability on an examination with instructions written in braille. A student with dyslexia, however, will likely have greater difficulty with such an examination because their disability directly impacts their ability to perform to their highest capacity on the exam. One student with dyslexia remarked:

I think the only knowledge they have is from past student experiences of individuals with disabilities and even so each case is very different. Well, someone else in the class might have had dyslexia but it depends on the severity of the dyslexia in terms of, maybe they don’t need screen-reading software for their books (while this student did need that service as an accommodation).”

While invisible disabilities may not appear to require an accommodation at first, these disabilities present barriers to student success that do require accommodations to insure academic equality. After a student provides appropriate medical documentation for their disability they meet with the staff at SDS to decide upon accommodations that will be reasonable

for each class in which they are enrolled. Student respondents provided varying accounts of this experience at Cornell. In best practice, this meeting is a discussion of how the individual student can best reasonably obtain equality in the course.

One faculty member expressed a belief that accommodations were unfair because many disability cases go undiagnosed. This respondent asserted, “I want the university to do a blind diagnosis of a large group of students, half of whom have a diagnosis and half of whom don’t, and see if a blind tester can distinguish between the groups reasonably clearly.” This quote highlights faculty skepticism of not only the accommodation process at Cornell, but of a greater distrust in the diagnosing of all disabilities. While this paper does not dismiss the likelihood of some students at Cornell having disabilities that are not diagnosed, it is not fair to hold students accountable for the non-action of others. Furthermore, it would seem logical that students with more severe disabilities would be diagnosed first and thus would be more likely to be receiving educational accommodations. It is important to remember that these disabilities, although not readily visible, are still significant and require classroom accommodations to insure equality for students with disabilities in the classroom.

One faculty respondent summed up their concerns by suggesting, “My sense is that most faculty are very willing to accommodate students with disabilities, they just want to make sure that the students request is legitimate.” Sufficient verification for SDS should be sufficient justification for faculty members, as the staff directors at SDS are specifically trained to work with students with disabilities. It would clearly be beneficial to further clarify this process to faculty members, however, and possibly even include faculty members throughout the accommodation process if they are willing to play a larger role in designing reasonable classroom accommodations.

One faculty member suggested that students should not receive accommodations such as extended time on exams because similar accommodations may be difficult to provide for students outside of educational situations. This respondent asserted that, "We do them an extraordinary disservice. No one is going to give them extra time in the real world for their ADHD. It is a ridiculous system that is unfair to other students." It appears as though this concern attempts to address two overlapping, yet unique, concerns pertaining to student accommodations. The issue of providing accommodations to legitimate disabilities does extend beyond educational organizations provided proper medical documentation. As shown earlier, most work organizations provide reasonable accommodations to workers with disabilities adhering to the same legislation that applies to postsecondary universities. The second concern mentioned was discussed by other faculty respondents as well; that is the issue of fairness to other students in the classroom.

#### Faculty Concern for Academic Fairness

While every academic classroom has a different environment, faculty members clearly expressed a desire for academic fairness. In this article, the concept of academic fairness dictates the extent to which members of the classroom have an equal opportunity to succeed academically. The level of perceived equality may vary for many reasons; the most important reason for this paper, however, is academic accommodations for students with disabilities. It is also important to note that for the purposes of this paper, academic success is measured by the final grades which faculty members assign students at the conclusion of the course.

Faculty members often referenced fairness in the classroom as a primary concern for academic accommodations, with faculty member suggesting that when interacting with students

with disabilities, “The most general issue is creating opportunities that are fair to all students in the class.” This issue may be particularly salient at Cornell, where many of the accommodations are for “invisible” or cognitive disabilities that may not be immediately noticeable. Several faculty members touched upon fairness issues when provided the space for free responses with one faculty member succinctly stating that “faculty sometime believes that accommodations provide an unfair advantage.” This issue of fairness may or may not relate to the previously discussed skepticism of legitimacy, but faculty concerns for fairness may lead to even more serious negative consequences for students with disabilities if not handled appropriately.

The issue of academic fairness presents an interesting paradox. While most faculty members did not express a desire to receive more training for students with disabilities, as detailed in Appendix A, (Mean = 3.44/7), they did express qualitative concerns for academic fairness. This suggests that faculty members are unsure of how to correctly handle certain accommodation situations, but do not desire additional training regarding these issues. Some faculty may express a desire to learn more about students with disabilities, such as the respondent who asked for more information detailing “how to provide a fair accommodation,” but these requests appear to be in the minority.

Faculty members likely have minimal or no experience in diagnosing disabilities, a job left to medical professionals. While the concept of academic fairness is important, the violation of providing legal rights to students with disabilities ironically violates the ideal fairness which faculty members are attempting to preserve. Furthermore, faculty members are not properly trained to self-diagnose disability statuses. Faculty members may have best interests in mind when attempting to judge the veracity of an accommodation request but these attempts may lead to significant issues for students with disabilities.

The skepticism held by faculty members is exacerbated by the absence of evaluation in examining the effectiveness of the accommodation process. Faculty members may have legitimate concerns regarding the accommodation process but are legally mandated to provide certain accommodations. Furthermore, faculty members are not currently asked to provide feedback on their experience in interacting with students with disabilities. While they may be able to express concerns regarding the process, these concerns must be sent to SDS, the very organization which mandates faculty provide the accommodations. This cycle furthers distrust between the organizational subunits and enhances the loose coupling present within the organization.

Faculty skepticism, coupled with a potential lack of knowledge and hesitation to receive additional training, can lead to serious repercussions for students with disabilities. As previously noted, faculty members in general have insufficient familiarity with legislation pertaining to students with disabilities. At Cornell, faculty respondents indicated that they were not very knowledgeable about instructional and related accommodations for students with disabilities (Mean= 3.79/7). Furthermore, survey results showed that faculty believed that students with disabilities would rate faculty knowledge of classroom needs for students with disabilities at an even lower level (Mean= 3.28/7). These results indicate that faculty members not only rate their own level of knowledge as insufficient, but that they also believe students with disabilities view faculty members as even more unprepared than the faculty members view themselves.

Students with disabilities need to assist in making certain that accommodations are handled appropriately so as to insure that future interactions will involve less skepticism and be viewed as less of a burden for the faculty member. As one respondent suggested, "I think that faculty think that accommodations are somehow unfair or onerous. We need to dispel that stigma

by showing what accommodations actually look like in practice.” Another faculty member provided hope that appropriately handling interactions with students with disabilities can lead to more positive interactions in the future: “Until recently, I did not have a very thoughtful attitude toward understanding students with disabilities. Recent training experiences have changed my attitude quite a lot.” Faculty acceptance of accommodations is important for the success of students with disabilities in the classroom and students are cognizant of this; as one faculty member noted, “students are acutely aware of fairness issues.”

### Negative Consequences Anticipated from Accommodation Requests

A third important issue pertaining to discrimination against students with disabilities is derived not as much from the faculty members as from the students themselves. Students must request accommodations from faculty members in their courses. Since accommodation requests are made at the beginning of the academic semester, these requests are usually made without the student knowing the faculty member well. This lack of familiarity may lead to concerns that students with disabilities may face negative repercussions for requesting accommodations even if SDS has affirmed that they are reasonable to implement in the classroom. One faculty member documented this fear, noting that, “My students are very concerned about negative perceptions associated with their requests.” While students with disabilities may have fears regarding negative repercussions after interacting with faculty members, these interactions can be equally positive. Thus, it is important to note how these interactions impact students with disabilities and how these interactions can become more positive in the future.

It is first important to note that faculty acceptance of students with disabilities can have a tremendously positive impact on the experiences of these students. The quantitative results from



the faculty revealed the faculty consider themselves to be very receptive to accommodating students with disabilities (Mean= 5.44/7). Every student participant mentioned at least one positive experience of interacting with a faculty member. One student was even diagnosed with a learning disability by a professor with disability-related experience, gratefully noting the very positive impact that this professor had on his educational experience. Students repeatedly expressed this sentiment, commenting:

“Faculty, in general, at Cornell really want you to succeed. They want you to understand it (the course material), they want passion from the students.”

“All of my professors have gone out of their way to make sure I was put on a level playing field with other students.”

One faculty member “took extensive time outside of his office hours to sit down and teach me how to use the program” that was needed as a classroom accommodation.

While supportive faculty can provide a great advantage for students with disabilities, equally important are the potential negative consequences of faculty and student interactions. One faculty member re-told the following experience from a student:

“A student related the following to me, and I have no reason not to believe it: when presenting the letter to a faculty member the student was told "you won't need the extra time" and the faculty member refused to provide the accommodation. Student faced the choice of dropping the class or putting up with not having the accommodation.”

These negative interactions were also cited by most, though not all of the student respondents. A student with epilepsy reported feeling upset and discriminated against when a professor questioned her disability and asserted that it did not require an accommodation. Another student respondent feared that arguing with a professor for an accommodation request could result in academic consequences, even if the accommodation was approved by SDS. This student remarked, “If you want to fight it by going to SDS, then I personally believe your grade will suffer. A third student described their negative interactions with faculty members with the following description:

“Some were, I’m pretty sure, annoyed that they had to accommodate for one student, and it’s not all that encouraging. It’s not a good thing if you feel sorry or bad asking for accommodations, that’s not how it’s supposed to feel.”

Another troubling outcome originating from fear of negative repercussions is the omission of a student’s disability status. Students who are unsure of how faculty members will respond to their accommodation request may simply choose to disregard their legally available accommodations. This can be done in two ways; students may choose to not register with SDS at all, or they may choose to register with SDS at the beginning of the semester but then not request their available accommodation from professors. Multiple students suggested that they would regularly not inform professors of the accommodations they had agreed upon with SDS. It is discouraging to note that students with disabilities may intentionally choose to forgo accommodations which are they are legally appropriated as this choice clearly defeats the purpose of the relevant legislation.

Omission of disability status was noted by students who felt as though they could manage the coursework without assistance from an accommodation. Several students noted that they would prefer to be challenged by the coursework before requesting an accommodation from a professor. The challenge of completing coursework without an accommodation was described by one student as trying to hold oneself up to a higher responsibility academically. It is clear that students with disabilities may decide to postpone accommodation requests from professors, even if they have been afforded accommodations by SDS. This waiting period may last for different periods of time but students with disabilities clearly opt for a risky alternative when postponing accommodation requests. Postponing an accommodation request may be done as students with disabilities embrace a challenge or it may be due to fear for negative repercussions; whatever, the reason, this postponement obviously presents a significant opportunity for negative consequences for students with disabilities.

This waiting period may last for varying periods of time. The postponement of required accommodations is often ended only after a student realizes that they need the accommodation to complete their work to the best of their ability. This realization arrives later in the semester, often after the student has begun a paper which they need more time for or performed poorly on a class exam. As one student stated, "I'll usually take the first test with disability services- sometimes I'll be like oh my God why didn't I use those services! Then I'll go over there and talk to them."

While it is admirable that students with disabilities attempt to challenge themselves, postponing a necessary accommodation may result in a poor grade for an important examination at which point it will be too late to assist the student. Furthermore, faculty members seem to prefer that students with disabilities approach them with accommodation requests early in the semester as opposed to waiting to embrace the challenge of completing their work without an

accommodation. As a survey respondent noted, “There are always a couple of students who give me a letter the day before (or day of!) an exam which really messes up my planning for proctoring an extended time exam.” Another respondent agreed, corroborating the belief that, “Occasionally, students who have disabilities do not reveal them or ask for accommodations. That omission is more likely to cause a problem than anything else.”

One student who has an accommodation allowing for extra time noted that although they often request an accommodation, they do not use it unless they feel it is truly necessary. This student suggested that they register for the accommodation in the event that they need more assistance than anticipated. This student remarked, “Usually I’m out the door before the kids with regular time.” This finding was encouraging as it suggests that students with disabilities may attempt to complete the coursework to the best of their ability while also valuing academic equality. This also runs counter to faculty member suspicions that students with disabilities regularly attempt to take advantage of their disability status by requesting unnecessary accommodations.

#### Taking Advantage of a Disability Diagnosis

As discussed earlier, faculty members are often hesitant to recognize the legitimacy of disability diagnoses resulting in classroom accommodations. This skepticism is frequently extended by faculty members to the extent that they believe many students with disabilities are attempting to use their disability status as a competitive advantage. One faculty member requested that they receive further training on disability status so they could be certain, “that the disability classification is genuine and provides a fair playing field for all parties involved.” As

shown above, this skepticism may actually lead to negative repercussions for students with disabilities resulting in a playing field in which they are disadvantaged.

One faculty member professed, “I suspect faculty are always happy to accommodate a student(s) with disabilities, but are suspicious that some students are simply well trained manipulators who are gaming the system.” When students present their accommodation letter requests to faculty members it can result in feelings of discrimination and decrease their willingness to engage in similar interactions with faculty members in the future. Since faculty have a large amount of control over their classroom, students may originally hesitate to disclose their disability status to professors due to the potential for negative repercussions; this hesitation will only increase if students with disabilities have their fears of repercussions confirmed through negative interactions with faculty members. Students with disabilities are aware of faculty skepticism and are often offended by the notion that they are somehow cheating or playing the system. One student confessed:

“I find it to be very offensive. But at the same time too, they have no knowledge so they’re ignorant to the facts and they don’t understand the experience. They think, for example, having ADHD is another reason to take a pill and get extra time on a test. That I find to be very offensive. They had to do half as much work as I did in order to do what a regular student is expected to do; I think they would find it is a lot more challenging than just popping a pill and getting extra time.”

This viewpoint is especially relevant for students with invisible disabilities, which applies to the student respondent above and many others at Cornell. One faculty member confirmed the viewpoint of this student in their response to the survey, remarking:

“I am quite skeptical of the "disabilities" that students come with. They are not wheelchair bound, or similarly disabled. They are careless and don't try to focus. I resent having to offer them "extra time", because they don't know how to take a test. Similarly, having someone else have to take notes for you (if you are able-bodied) means you should not be at Cornell. Not everyone has the right to an Ivy League education.”

Just as student respondents were not oblivious to faculty skepticism, they were also aware that some students may indeed attempt to use their disability status to their advantage. One student conceded, “I’m sure there are instances when students are trying to take advantage of the system and there are instances where there is not accountability on the part of the students.” The student respondents for this research suggest that this lack of accountability is not typical for students with disabilities. The same respondent added, “I try to hold myself up to a higher level of responsibility when it comes to school. They (SDS) have to trust you to hold yourself so you’re not taking advantage.”

While it is possible that faculty members have had experiences with students with disabilities attempting to receive unfair accommodations, this does not imply that all, or even most, students with disabilities do not have a legitimate need for reasonable accommodations. This issue is again exacerbated by the loose coupling between the SDS staff and faculty members and by biases existing in the outside culture. The lack of coordination during the accommodation process facilitates faculty distrust of students with disabilities and this distrust should only increase if faculty members believe their suspicions of student manipulations have been confirmed.

Students with disabilities clearly face difficulties in postsecondary education not only from their disability, but from discriminatory faculty attitudes as well. As one faculty member added, “It is not a disability to be a day-dreamer or absent-minded. It demeans the whole system!” Ironically, however, discriminatory attitudes from faculty members can also demean the very academic integrity they wish to preserve. One faculty respondent summed up the difficulty of appropriate accommodations in asking, “How can I accommodate them without creating a huge burden for me and an unfair grading system (for anyone).”

The discrimination which many students with disabilities face can be traced back to the shifting temporal societal views of disability as well as previously discussed faculty priorities. While discrimination may have become institutionalized amongst faculty members, recent legislation, specifically the ADA, has provided hope for more positive interactions in the future. The hope for improvement at Cornell can be traced to SDS, which provides services specifically for students with disabilities.

In a manner consistent with the overlapping societal views towards people with disabilities, universities have also had to adjust their practices to provide more equitable services towards students with disabilities. The relevant legislation, proceeding at a similar rate to societal viewpoints, required significant shifts in how faculty interacted with students with disabilities. In order to maintain recognition as organizations, universities have complied with varying legal requirements over time. This legal compliance has resulted in benefits for students with disabilities but it was unable to completely eradicate discriminatory attitudes which already existed within these organizations.

Institutional Isomorphism and SDS

The alteration of the organizational coupling at Cornell began after the passage of the ADA in 1990, when disability issues began to become a greater societal priority. Organizations immediately responded to these pressures with varying strategic responses, although it appears as though over time one response came to be viewed as the optimal signal for external legitimacy. A large number of universities, including Cornell, responded to these external pressures by creating an office to deal directly with students with disabilities. Consistent with theory detailing institutional isomorphism, the creation of similar organizational subunits within postsecondary universities displayed a visible sign of compliance to society. This office, which came to be known as SDS, was given complete authority over virtually all aspects of disability issues at Cornell.

The founding of this center placed the focus of insuring disability equality in the classroom on the staff members at SDS. Thus, equitable treatment for students with disabilities became a priority for the staff members at SDS but not necessarily for faculty members who educate these students directly. Furthermore, the complete autonomy of SDS led to the potential for disharmony between the staff members of this newly created office and experienced the faculty members of the university. Faculty members who had previously held almost complete control over their classroom environment were now forced to comply with increasing numbers of accommodation requests from students with disabilities. The lack of collaborative effort between the two groups was maintained over time and still exists today, primarily at the expense of students with disabilities.

While faculty members may be willing to work with students with disabilities, it is obvious that this additional time can present difficulties for faculty member. While faculty may be receptive to accommodating students with disabilities, they are not equitably rewarded for any



additional efforts in assisting these students. As noted previously, however, this additional time is especially crucial for the success of students with disabilities. These difficulties are further complicated because courses vary greatly in both size and structure, oftentimes requiring different accommodations. For example, faculty instructing large lecture classes may be more receptive to providing additional time on an examination than faculty instructing smaller courses when the requested accommodation fundamentally alters the course structure. One faculty respondent agreed, stating they would like more information on “accommodating students with disabilities “when time and resources are limited. I believe nearly all faculty are supportive of the principle of accommodation, but many have limited support for doing it.” This disconnect may result in additional stress for faculty who wish to focus on their research.

Faculty members expressed a desire for “clear, practical advice of non-time consuming things to do for each student.” This willingness to comply is consistent with the belief that faculty, while willing to accommodate, have other professional duties which must be afforded significant time and attention. Another faculty member discussed their difficulty in arranging an accommodation for a student when they had limited training and support:

“I had to accommodate a student with Asperger syndrome, OCD and Turret's. Without training it was stressful and taxing for the other students in the class and myself. Having had some training and support from the college and university would have made it definitely easier.”

Several respondents from both the student interviews and faculty survey suggested additional training for faculty members. While this may be helpful in assisting students with disabilities, several faculty respondents stated their skepticism that additional training would

improve these interactions. It is also important to note that additional training is frequently offered through programs sponsored by both SDS and the Cornell Center for Teaching Excellence. These quantitative results from the faculty survey show how rarely these programs are utilized, however, with only 19% of participants responding that they have received any form of training for working with students with disabilities while at Cornell.

Faculty members may have varying views on training from SDS in part because of the ambiguity of what a training program may entail. For example, it seems probable that faculty members would be open to relatively brief updates from SDS staff members detailing the accommodation process and informing faculty of any disability news which may be relevant to their classrooms. Faculty would presumably not be as receptive to a more standardized form training which focuses on general information on specific disabilities or additional information which is likely extraneous to the majority of faculty members. Respondents indicated that the lack of enthusiasm for additional training includes students with disabilities, but also suggested faculty in general do not avail themselves to almost any form of standardized training.

Faculty disinterest in training, although somewhat discouraging, can be expected to a degree due to their many responsibilities. This disinterest does not necessarily imply that these faculty members are unwilling to work with students with disabilities, but it does suggest that many faculty members feel as though providing individualized appropriate accommodations may be too large of a burden. Several faculty quotes in support of this finding are listed below:

“For me, give me a factsheet at the beginning of my first year of the % of students that will probably need accommodation. Spare me any live training. I already have too many meetings. Let me come to SDS with problems and have them be attentive at

helping fix them. Not useful for them to give me a long list of potential problems and solutions; I won't read it since I might only face 1 or 2.”

“Faculty members don't learn things that don't interest them. Those who are interested figure it out, those who aren't won't learn anyhow.”

“Does it matter until it comes up in one of your classes? Before then, I am not interested. We have plenty of other time sucks.”

“As-needs training and information. Until I need to deal with a student with disabilities, training etc. is a distraction that I won't pay attention to (Cornell does way too much ineffective outreach of this sort). Once I advise such a student or have one in my class I will be more than happy to learn.”

“I think that Cornell provides considerable resources for faculty who need to accommodate students with disabilities. However, it is not clear to me why faculty need training before the need for it arises.”

Faculty members may not all desire training but this does not preclude them from being concerned to academic equality for students with disabilities. The lack of desire for training may also be a function of their lack of trust in SDS to appropriately handle the majority of tasks associated with the accommodation process. While faculty members may be aware of the existence of SDS, many have never interacted with their staff members beyond receiving a note dictating the terms of classroom accommodations which had been previously determined without consultation from the professor themselves. Furthermore, a lack of any form of organizational training from SDS on disability issues only serves to heighten the lack of communication leading to loose coupling within the organization. One professor exclaimed that although he had worked

at Cornell for over thirty years he had never met nor had any significant interactions with anyone affiliated with SDS. Another faculty member described the lack of interactions between faculty members and SDS, stating:

“We have worked together well on it, in my view, and I’ve suggested out of class resources, too. But it does seem as if it’s individual, case-by-case- not something that comes up at faculty meetings- not well institutionalized, I guess is the term I’m looking for.”

If faculty members are able to collaborate with SDS for the majority of the accommodation process, they should benefit from the expertise of these staff members. This is especially important if faculty members continue to lack relevant training on working with students with disabilities. A faculty respondent noted, “Good communication from SDS to faculty about each case is vital.” Proper communication and trust in SDS to appropriately handle the accommodation process and insure classroom equality should result in optimal interactions for faculty and students with disabilities. Fortunately, faculty members who have previously interacted closely with SDS provided positive feedback regarding their experiences:

“Kappy and Michelle (SDS staff members) are always available to talk through what a personal accommodation request might entail, but I wonder how many faculty even bother to speak with them. There should be a university-wide training.”

“Experiences so far have been great. I had a visually impaired student in my class and worked with Student Disability Services. This seemed to all work very efficient and effectively.”

“I have taught large intro classes for many years. I have generally been quite satisfied with how SDS has handled students with disabilities at Cornell.”

“Graduate student with ADHD. Did not ask for accommodation but became clear it was essential. Once problem was identified, support from Cornell has been excellent.”

“I think the key challenge is identifying when a student has a disability that requires an accommodation. I feel the process at Cornell handles this quite well, which then makes it easier for faculty to provide the necessary accommodation.”

“Student Disability Services are great. Knowing they exist and can help out is key.”

The support that SDS provides to students with disabilities as well as faculty members is clearly imperative to the success of interactions between these two populations. Since faculty members have other priorities, they often prioritize other interests ahead of accommodating students with disabilities; this is due in large part to the significant time that proper accommodations may require. Faculty concerns for time were expressed by several respondents, noting, “Where does one draw the line between ‘reasonable’ accommodation and excessive personal help for a single student?” Another faculty member detailed the issue with the following response:

“Of course the main problem is that accommodating disabilities falls almost entirely to me, and although I do my best, I sometimes wish I didn't have to spend so many extra hours figuring out different accommodations, as it takes time away from my other professorial duties.”

The differences between primary interests for faculty members and SDS staff members suggest that interactions between faculty and students with disabilities could benefit most directly from an increase in the responsibilities assigned to SDS. This shift would provide benefits for all groups involved and is consistent with institutional practices identified by the research previously discussed. Furthermore, this approach appears to have been successful for faculty members in the past:

“It has been easy when student support services exist to help (provide testing accommodation locations, appt for students, faculty advice & support, etc.), and it is easy when students come to me to discuss their own needs; otherwise it is more difficult and a less positive experience. It is also hard to know how to create/provide accommodations that make the experience ‘somewhat equivalent’”.

This approach has been equally successful for students with disabilities. By providing support to faculty members throughout the accommodation process, students feel as though they are placing less of a burden on the individual faculty members to accommodate each individual student. One student spoke about the ease of integrating already-course programs into every classroom on campus. These programs include student study-aids such as Video-note and Take-note, which require no additional effort from the professor but can greatly assist students with disabilities that may have difficulty in remaining attentive throughout an extended lecture. These materials are already made available to all students in several courses and can be viewed as an accommodation for all students enrolled in the class. Professors may also choose to regularly utilize this service but not provide the materials unless student requests it as part of an accommodation or is excused from attending the class. This student commented on how these services can greatly aid a student with disability if used by professors, but noted that asking for

these services as an accommodation for a disability opens the possibility of discrimination from faculty members:

“It would be nice if those things were just part of the class and it was an accommodation that a lot of us could use and you wouldn’t feel weird or out of place going up to the professor and having to ask for these extra things and worrying do people now know? It is a very personal, private thing.”

A faculty member respondent concurred with this student, noting that students may feel more comfortable making their accommodation requests if the request is perceived as less of a burden upon the professor:

“I teach a large class so accommodations for special test rooms and note taking are planned before the semester begins. I think that this is important so that students feel their requests for accommodations are nothing out of the ordinary and not a burden on the professor.”

Several other faculty respondents agreed that the accommodation process would be easier if more support was provided. Respondents asked for additional help by making requests which included, “more support to figure out logistics of accommodations; provide a proctor for the exams” and, “take more of the burden off faculty and TAs.” The respondent who requested proctors be provided for exams also commented on their past experiences with SDS suggesting that SDS should not, “mandate something without providing logistical support for how it will actually work.”

The support requested by faculty members would ideally be provided by an increase of services offered by SDS as they are specifically trained to deal with students with disabilities.

Since not all faculty members have felt sufficiently supported by SDS in the past, however, they may continue to feel as though they do not have a strong relationship with the SDS staff. This lack of trust is especially relevant in the classroom, where faculty members typically have nearly complete autonomy and may feel as though SDS delivers unwarranted and intrusive mandates. While faculty members may regularly follow the process detailed by SDS, further support and establishing a more collaborative, trusting relationship with SDS staff members would benefit students with disabilities by limiting the burden perceived by faculty members. Several faculty members and one student noted the issue of lack of support and familiarity with the staff at SDS, illuminated best by the following quotes:

“I always try to accommodate students and follow the suggestions from the Disabilities office. However, sometimes it is hard to accommodate students in smaller classes where we are not assigned teaching assistants. Accommodations for tests often involve separate testing times in separate rooms. Our department does not have a standard backup for these situations. It takes time and much planning.”

“I am very receptive to accommodating students' special needs. However, since I had to figure out the logistics of everything, it sometimes felt like an unsupported mandate--i.e. you are **REQUIRED** to do x, y, and z but there is no support offered to make sure you can--and know how--to meet these requirements. I found that frustrating and stressful.... I always wondered who did the Disabilities Office think should sit during extra time exams, and why didn't they provide someone to do it since they mandated it? I have heard that some professors let the accommodations students sit in a room alone to take exams because "it's not their problem" if the students' are unmonitored. I was too conscientious to do that, but as a result I was



often stressed out when trying to figure everything out on my own. The experience could be improved by providing support to meet the required accommodations that does not put the onus on the professor to solve everything.”

## Recommendations for Cornell University

### Testing Center for Students with Disabilities

Although SDS has competently handled students with disabilities in the past, it seems apparent that changes should be implemented to enhance the efficiency of working with students with disabilities. This research suggests actions be taken to improve two aspects relating to SDS staff, faculty members, and students with disabilities. The first suggestion is the creation of a test center which will facilitate examinations, enhance the resources available to students with disabilities on campus, and provide practical advice for accommodations in courses with varying sizes and structures.

A test center was mentioned by both faculty respondents and one student as a practical improvement which could be implemented by Cornell. Test centers, which exist at many other universities throughout the United States, are established to provide faculty members and teaching assistants with additional support for classroom examinations. The student who spoke of support from a test center had transferred to Cornell from another postsecondary university. Their old school had a testing center, which was very beneficial to their academic experience. The student described the testing center as an on-campus wing in a library which had been built for approximately 15-20 students. In addition to ample space for students to take an examination, there were also several computers which had been specifically programmed for use by students with disabilities. This student noted the convenience of the testing center, explaining how a

professor could easily arrange for a proctor to be present in the test center at the time of an examination, thereby minimizing the burden on all parties involved. The student added that, “The room was a nice place to be. It was a much calmer environment. I liked it a lot.”

Many faculty respondents also spoke positively of previous support provided by university-sponsored testing centers. Some of these professors had previous experiences with a testing center while others had learned of their existence from faculty members at other postsecondary universities. It is also important to note that all respondents who mentioned a testing center spoke positively of the experience. Faculty praise for other testing centers and desire for one at Cornell was stated via many responses to the survey. Specifically many respondents discussed a testing center when asked: “In general, what steps might Cornell University take to insure that faculty members are better prepared to respond to the instructional and mentoring needs of students with disabilities?” Several of the responses relating to a testing center are listed below:

“The accommodations should be handled centrally. When I have 15% of my class with accommodation requests for exams, it is almost impossible to (a) find a room and (b) find someone to proctor the exam. At some schools (IC for example), there is an office that takes care of this. The professor just has to provide that office with the exam and all is taken care of from there.”

“Students requesting accommodation for longer time on tests; to record lectures; for note takers. SDS could provide more assistance with these. While these have not generally been a problem, SDS offices at other universities provide more services

including arranging for the SDS office to proctor quizzes and exams. Faculty sends the quiz to the SDS office on these other campuses and the SDS office proctors.”

“The process of providing these accommodations would be easier if Cornell would follow the practice used at some other universities of using a central examination service that would take responsibility for administering exams under each student's respective needed circumstances. Currently, it is often difficult to make accommodations for individual students, particularly in large classes.”

“Students with disabilities frequently can have special exam conditions including extended time and quiet environment. Some universities have spaces for these accommodations available and staffed. Cornell does not - thus professors always have to scramble to find spaces and staff to accommodate students. This adds a significant burden for faculty and the space/staff we are able to come up with is frequently NOT ideal for the student.”

“One thing that would be helpful at Cornell would be instituting a practice that existed at two other Universities where I had worked previously. At Cornell, I must make the arrangements for room, proctor, etc. to meet needed accommodations for exams. At the other Universities, I needed only to provide the exam and the Office of Student Disability Services administered the exam. Given the increasingly limited resources to support a course, having a centralized test accommodation site would be useful to the faculty.”

“Primary disability experience involves students needing special accommodations for exams; this could improve by having a test center on campus to help administer

accommodation exams. As it stands now, TAs must proctor these exams, often at the cost of their own time. Test centers are very common at other universities and it is surprising Cornell does not have one.”

The addition of a testing center would clearly be welcomed by faculty members at Cornell. It also appears as though this center would provide benefits for students with disabilities requiring testing accommodations. It is also interesting to note that the testing center would benefit students with both cognitive and physical disabilities. Students with mobility-related disabilities would benefit from having a standardized location for their examinations if they are unable to access the room where an exam is being held. Students with invisible disabilities, representing the majority of the disability population at Cornell, would benefit from being able to complete examinations with their reasonable accommodations with minimal inconvenience for both the student and their instructor. This logic also suggests that the creation of a testing center would eventually encourage students with disabilities to become more comfortable in disclosing their disability to faculty members, resulting in greater equality for students with disabilities.

A testing center would clearly alleviate many of the burdens in the accommodation process which are currently handled by Cornell faculty members. Furthermore, this testing center would naturally require additional staff members to serve as proctors and administrators. If this center was placed under the guidance of SDS, the additional staff members would allow for current SDS staff to engage in other activities to the benefit of students with disabilities. This would provide an opportunity to alleviate the significant workload of approximately 400 students each from the two SDS directors. An increase in resources would thus allow staff members to more successfully integrate the accommodation process to existing classroom norms, establishing a better relationship with faculty members. The gradual integration of faculty

members into the accommodation process is the second suggestion implied by the results of this research.

### Tightened Coupling between Organizational Subunits

Although Cornell was attempting to embrace the disability community with the creation of SDS, the results of this research detail how the university failed to fully integrate this new office with previously existing faculty norms and beliefs. The integration of faculty into the accommodation process would also provide benefits for all parties involved. With additional resources, the SDS staff members would have the opportunity to expand their services for students with disabilities. This would provide SDS with the opportunity to work more closely with faculty members in designing classroom accommodations that are consistent with the academic environment desired by the professor while also insuring that students with disabilities continue to receive reasonable accommodations.

This integration could occur through several methods. One manner of integrating faculty members would be to hold a meeting at the beginning of the semester, ideally with the individual students who require an accommodation being present. At this meeting, SDS staff, faculty members, and students could discuss the course and the appropriate accommodations to provide equal opportunity in the classroom. Currently, these meetings do not involve faculty input. If faculty were to have the opportunity to work with the SDS staff more closely it would serve to establish a greater trust between the faculty members and SDS. Students would also benefit by continuing to receive accommodations; however, since these meetings would be standard at the beginning of the academic year, students should feel as though they are placing less of a burden upon faculty members.

Another method which would serve to more fully integrate faculty members would be to have them meet with an SDS staff member at the beginning of the semester to discuss their course and the general classroom environment. In this meeting, faculty members could describe their course to the staff members at SDS. This discussion would provide the SDS staff with a great deal more information on individual courses; combined with the expertise of the SDS staff on disability accommodations, students would be much more likely to receive the appropriate accommodations for any course. This meeting would be at the convenience of the faculty member, requiring significantly less time than general training regarding students with disabilities. Faculty members would be more confident that students are receiving appropriate accommodations after this meeting and should feel more comfortable in working with SDS after a regular relationship has been established with an SDS staff member.

This meeting should be conducted at the convenience of the faculty member and be a collaborative effort to improve classroom equality while imposing minimal impact upon the manner in which the faculty member instructs the course. By integrating faculty members into the accommodation process, accommodations for students with disabilities should be seen as less intrusive to faculty autonomy in the classroom. An additional meeting with faculty members may appear to be a minor change, but this integration will result in a tighter coupling between the organizational units within the university. When all parties involved feel more confident that their concerns have been appropriately addressed the organization will function more efficiently and discrimination against students with disabilities should decline.

If it is impossible to arrange meetings with faculty to discuss individualized accommodations there are still other methods through which SDS could enhance faculty collaboration in the accommodation process. As mentioned earlier, it may be helpful for SDS

staff members to briefly meet with faculty members to explain the accommodation process and relay any disability news which may directly impact faculty members. This would also present a private forum for faculty to ask SDS staff members questions pertaining to students with disabilities. This could be easily accomplished through occasional and brief SDS presentations at regular faculty meetings. These meetings would be neither difficult nor time-consuming for either party involved, but if SDS were to present a physical presence at the convenience of faculty members the benefits for students with disabilities could be significant.

As the coupling within the university becomes tighter, the organization should operate more efficiently for all parties. Legal compliance to provide accommodations will still be a factor in the accommodation process but students with disabilities should encounter decreasing levels of resistance to accommodation requests as faculty feel more comfortable with the accommodation process. Similarly, the coupling between students and the accommodation process will also increase over time as they become more familiar with the accommodation process. This tightened coupling will also increase the level of trust between SDS staff and faculty members when identifying student need for accommodations. Currently, SDS has complete autonomy in arranging accommodations; however, a more collaborative relationship should enhance the role of faculty members in identifying students with legitimate needs; this would aid students who may have undiagnosed disabilities, as well as provide a greater level of legitimacy for faculty members who question the necessity of certain accommodations. There has been a partial implementation of the benefits provided for students with disabilities, but the loose coupling within the organization prevents Cornell from efficiently addressing means-ends issues relating to students with disabilities.

Postsecondary universities are often the first organizations which require people with disabilities to advocate for their own accommodations. In high school most students agree upon accommodations with administrators under the guidance of their parents or guardians. Independence in the accommodation process is an important step for people with disabilities and it is important that students with disabilities continue to advocate for their own needs. It is equally important, however, that people with disabilities learn how to appropriately request accommodations. Currently, the large number of students with disabilities prohibits truly individualized accommodation plans; even though students who register for disability services may have to meet with SDS staff, they are often provided with a set of standardized accommodation options which vary by disability status. If SDS were to receive additional resources, however, students with disabilities would receive greater personal attention when requesting accommodations. This increase in personal attention would benefit students not only during the accommodation process at the postsecondary level, but it will also serve to benefit these students when they graduate and must request reasonable accommodations from employers.

The coupling between organizational subunits could also be aided by providing more value to the staff members in each college who serve as liaisons to SDS. This role appears to be largely symbolic, even to those who hold the position. It has already been noted that symbolic actions may have significant impacts upon members with an organization (Edelman, 1992); it is important that those who hold the liaison position realize their value in tightening the internal coupling of the organization. An increase in the importance of this role would provide faculty members with a visible connection to SDS and an additional outlet for any inquiries which they may have regarding SDS or students with disabilities.



## Future Directions

The research detailed in this work suggests several avenues for future research. First, empirical research should be conducted to examine how decoupling can vary within internal subunits. For example, under what conditions is decoupling most likely to create issues between subunits? It would also be useful to detail how varying levels of coupling impact organizations based upon the industry to which the organization belongs or the ends which the organization hopes to produce. It is also imperative that more research be conducted on the relationships between organizations and their environments. The role of external pressures should be monitored at varying stages of organizational development, examining how these pressures influence the behaviors, norms, and practices which become adopted by the organization.

Next, this work also suggests new opportunities for research related to people with disabilities. The issue of loose coupling between varying subunits should be examined in other organizations, such as workplace settings. Similar work has been conducted on EEOC groups, but disability has never been the focus of this research; furthermore, the majority of this research was conducted before the ADA had been fully implemented (Edelman, 1992).

Finally, this research suggests new research on the identification of people with disabilities within organizations. Multiple faculty respondents suggested that there may be a great number of students with undiagnosed disabilities within the organization. Future research should detail if these claims are valid, and then examine the ramifications of these hidden people with disabilities. A greater number of disability diagnoses should result in a greater number of requested accommodations. This may lead to more employer support for accommodation

programs and possibly reduce the concerns for negative consequences that people with disabilities may have when requesting reasonable accommodations.

## Limitations

Despite my broadly supportive findings, there were also several limitations to this research which may lead to additional topics for future research. First, this study was conducted using data collected from only one university; furthermore, as noted earlier, Cornell has factors which make it unique as a postsecondary university. Future research should examine the coupling of subunits at other universities, particularly at universities which enroll a greater number of students with physical disabilities.

Next, this research insured anonymity for faculty respondents which made it impossible to link together qualitative responses. Although this data provides rich details on the experiences of faculty members, the anonymity of responses makes it impossible to link together qualitative results and the quantitative data or demographic data which was collected. Individual differences in faculty experiences may have led to additional predictors and data which were not collected in this study. Furthermore, the survey sent to faculty members was not sent to respondents directly through the principal investigator. While not ideal, it seems unlikely that this would have significant results on the survey data because all responses were anonymous.

Finally, this research did not place restrictions on the students with disabilities who were allowed to participate in the research. Although I have previously noted the potential for confounding results when multiple disability groups are present, I believe it was important to not exclude respondents with varying disabilities for two reasons. First, the relevant legislation covers both mental and physical impairments, and so it logically follows that this research should

also examine both of these groups. Next, the difficulty in attracting student participants would have made it extremely difficult to collect data from a sufficient number of respondents had the population of potential participants been decreased.

## Conclusion

Although it is apparent that people with disabilities face significant barriers to equality within organizations, there are reasons to hope that this situation may be improved in the future. Students with disabilities and faculty members have significant issues when interacting during the accommodation process, due in part to discrimination against people with disabilities. If SDS is able to provide faculty members with a greater sense of readiness to interact with these students, however, future students may have more positive interactions. This can be done in part by involving faculty members in the entire accommodation process.

Involving faculty members in the accommodation process should increase their trust in SDS, students with disabilities, and the general accommodation process. The integration of these groups would result in tighter coupling between the organizational subunits. Following Bromley and Powell (2012), it is important to note that the relevant issues in this case are likely indicative of many instances means-ends decoupling within organizations. While the creation of SDS may have been a symbolic signal by Cornell, the impact this subunit upon students and faculty members is significant on a daily basis.

It is important to continue to implement the neo-institutional viewpoint in research examining people with disabilities and the organizations they are affiliated with. Institutional isomorphism and decoupling are two important forces shaping students with disabilities and it is imperative that future research continue to develop a further understanding of how they impact

postsecondary education organizations. Cornell University is best served by producing quality students, both with and without disabilities. While students with disabilities have certainly gained opportunities for equality in the last several decades, there are still significant gains to be made before students with disabilities achieve equality in postsecondary organizations.

## APPENDIX A- Faculty Survey Questions

How would you rate each of the following on a seven-point scale?

In general, how receptive do you think most faculty members at Cornell are to working with students with disabilities?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7 (1 being very unreceptive, 4 being neutral, and 7 being very receptive)

Very Unreceptive-- Neutral- Very Receptive

Statistic	In general, how receptive do you think most faculty members at Cornell are to accommodating students with disabilities?
Min Value	2
Max Value	7
Mean	5.44
Variance	1.56
Standard Deviation	1.25
Total Responses	155

Have you received any form of training for working with students with disabilities through an employer other than Cornell University? For the purposes of this survey, please consider training as the education or instruction of the faculty in a formal setting, meant to increase their capability in working as an instructor at the postsecondary level.

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	18	11%
2	No	141	89%
	Total	159	100%

Have you received any form of training for working with students with disabilities while at Cornell?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	30	19%
2	No	129	81%
	Total	159	100%

How would you rate the quality of training you received to prepare you for working effectively in the classroom with students with disabilities?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7 (1 being very weak, 4 being neutral, and 7 being very strong)

Not at all Useful- Neutral- Extremely Useful

Statistic	How would you rate the quality of training you received to prepare you for working effectively in the classroom with students with disabilities?
Min Value	3
Max Value	7
Mean	5.10
Variance	1.33
Standard Deviation	1.16
Total Responses	30

How would you rate the availability of training methods meant to prepare faculty members to work effectively in the classroom with students with disabilities?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7 (1 being very weak, 4 being neutral, and 7 being very strong)

Very Available- Neutral- Not Very Available

Statistic	How would you rate the availability of training methods meant to prepare faculty members to work effectively in the classroom with students with disabilities?
Min Value	1
Max Value	7
Mean	4.62
Variance	1.74
Standard Deviation	1.32
Total Responses	29

How much experience do you have interacting with people with disabilities outside of the classroom?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7 (1 being very limited experience, 4 being neutral, and 7 being very ample experience)

Very Limited Experience- Neutral- Very Ample Experience

Statistic	How much experience do you have interacting with people with disabilities outside of the classroom?
Min Value	1
Max Value	7
Mean	3.75
Variance	3.63
Standard Deviation	1.90
Total Responses	157

How much experience do you have interacting with people with disabilities in the classroom?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7 (1 being very limited experience, 4 being neutral, and 7 being very ample experience)

Very Limited Experience- Neutral- Very Ample Experience

Statistic	How much experience do you have interacting with students with disabilities in the classroom?
Min Value	1
Max Value	7
Mean	3.64
Variance	3.63
Standard Deviation	1.91
Total Responses	158

How do you think that students with disabilities would rate faculty knowledge of classroom needs for students with disabilities?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7 (1 being very limited knowledge, 4 being neutral, and 7 being very strong knowledge)

Very Limited Knowledge- Neutral- Very Strong Knowledge

Statistic	How do you think that students with disabilities would rate faculty knowledge of classroom needs for students with disabilities?
Min Value	1
Max Value	7
Mean	3.28
Variance	1.77
Standard Deviation	1.33
Total Responses	151

How knowledgeable are you about instructional and related accommodations for students with disabilities?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7 (1 being very limited knowledge, 4 being neutral, and 7 being very strong knowledge)

Very Limited Knowledge- Neutral- Very Strong Knowledge

Statistic	How knowledgeable are you about instructional and related accommodations for students with disabilities?
Min Value	1
Max Value	7
Mean	3.79
Variance	3.06
Standard Deviation	1.75
Total Responses	158

How would you rate the level of support you have received from the Student Disability Services Office in working with students who have disabilities?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7 (1 being very weak support, 4 being neutral, and 7 being very strong support) or Have not worked with SDS

Very Weak Support- Neutral- Very Strong Support

Statistic	How would you rate the level of support you have received from the Student Disability Services Office in have disabilities?
Min Value	1
Max Value	7



Statistic	How would you rate the level of support you have received from the Student Disability Services Office in have disabilities?
Mean	4.12
Variance	3.21
Standard Deviation	1.79
Total Responses	135

To what extent do you want to receive more training for working with students with disabilities?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7 (1 being very limited desire, 4 being neutral, and 7 being very strong desire)

Very Limited Desire- Neutral- Very Strong Desire

Statistic	To what extent do you want to receive more training for working with students with disabilities?
Min Value	1
Max Value	7
Mean	3.44
Variance	3.42
Standard Deviation	1.85
Total Responses	153

In your experience, which key questions or concerns are most relevant to faculty who interact with students with disabilities?

Space will then be provided for an open-ended response.

Frequently discussed categories included:

Faculty skepticism of the legitimacy of student disability statuses, faculty attempting to support students with disabilities, lack of administrative support for dealing with classroom accommodations, student fears for negative repercussions to accommodation requests, and faculty concerns for academic equality in the classroom.

In general, what steps might Cornell University take to insure that faculty members are better prepared to respond to the instructional and mentoring needs of students with disabilities?

Space will then be provided for an open-ended response.

Frequently discussed categories included:

Faculty concerns for academic equality in the classroom, faculty skepticism of the legitimacy of student disability statuses, faculty collaboration with SDS to provide classroom accommodations, student fears for negative repercussions to accommodation requests.

Please detail any personal experiences with students with disabilities requesting an accommodation. How could these experiences be improved?

Space will then be provided for an open-ended response.

Frequently discussed categories included:

Faculty collaboration with SDS to provide classroom accommodations, faculty disinterest in standardized training programs, faculty skepticism of the legitimacy of student disability statuses.

## Demographics

School/College- (College of Agriculture and Life Sciences; College of Architecture, Art, and Planning; College of Human Ecology; School of Hotel Administration; College of Arts and Sciences; College of Engineering)

Gender- (Male; Female)

Age- (Under 34; 35-44; 45-54; 55-64; 65-74; Over 75)

Race/ Ethnicity- (African American; American Indian; Asian American; Pacific Islander; Hispanic; Other)

Position- (Assistant Professor; Associate Professor; Full Professor; Lecturer)

## APPENDIX B- Student Interview Questions

Questions regarding life in general at Cornell University:

Please describe your experience as a student with a disability here at Cornell; please give me a few examples that illustrate your experience at Cornell.

What are the most important issues facing Cornell in working with students with disabilities?

How do you think that Cornell can address these issues? Please be specific.

What do you think that Cornell can do to better assist students with disabilities to succeed while at Cornell?

How can Cornell best integrate students with disabilities into life as a student at Cornell?

How can Cornell best attract students with disabilities to matriculate in the future? Why will this be effective?

Questions specific to administrators:

Please describe the support you have received from the Student Disability Services Office.

How do you feel Cornell compares to other universities in terms of accommodating students with disabilities? What experiences have led you to believe this?

What can Cornell administrators do to assist Cornell faculty in interacting and working with students with disabilities?

Questions specific to faculty at Cornell:

Describe your experiences with faculty. Please provide specific examples.

What are the strengths of the Cornell faculty in interacting and working with students with disabilities? What are the weaknesses?

How well do you feel that faculty members at Cornell are trained to work with students with disabilities? Can you provide specific examples that helped form this impression?

In general, how receptive do you think most faculty members at Cornell are to accommodating students with disabilities? Please provide specific examples that helped form this impression.

How would you describe faculty knowledge of classroom needs for students with disabilities?

Can you provide specific examples that helped form this impression?

## APPENDIX C

### Typical Classroom/Faculty Accommodations

Frequently used accommodations for students with: Autism Spectrum Disorders, ADHD, Learning Disabilities, Blindness/Low Vision, Deafness/Hard of Hearing, Chronic Medical Conditions, Mobility-Related Disabilities, Psychological Disabilities, Speech-Language Disorders

Ability to take breaks

Accessible classrooms/location/furniture

Accommodations for work/group assignments dependent on the group (often individual assignments for students with disabilities as a substitute for group assignments)

Adaptive computer equipment

Adjustments in lighting

Advance notice/ preparation when changes are anticipated

Alternative print formats

Appropriate seating arrangements

Assistive computer technology (such as screen-reading software or voice activated software)

Computer use, especially for word processing

Exam modifications, including

Adaptive equipment including computer screen readers

Alternative formats such as braille or enlarged print

Alternative to scantron form exams

Breaks

Extended time

Interpreter for test instructions or to relay student questions

Readers

Reduced-distraction test environment

Scribe

Use of a computer for essay exams

Use of assistive technology

Flexibility in scheduling classes and exams or absence policies

Instructor assistance outside of the classroom

Lab or library assistance

Magnification devices

Note-takers

One-on-one meetings with the student

Raised lettering

Recorded lectures

Sign-language or oral interpreters

Tactile cues

Tape recording lectures

Textbooks on tape

Written lectures

Written materials provided in electronic format

## APPENDIX D

### Typical Disabilities among Students at Cornell University

#### Visible/ Physical

Amputation

Blindness/ Low Vision

Lupus erythematosus

Neuromuscular disorders

Paraplegia

Quadriplegia

#### Invisible/ Cognitive

Anxiety disorder

Autism spectrum disorder

Arthritis

Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Bipolar disorder

Cardiovascular conditions

Cerebral palsy



Chronic fatigue disorders

Deafness/ Hard of hearing

Depression

Diabetes

Dyslexia

Eating disorders

Learning disabilities

Brain injuries

Developmental aphasia

Perceptual disabilities

Multiple sclerosis

Obsessive compulsive disorder

Schizophrenia

Seizure disorders

Sickle cell anemia

Tourette's syndrome

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