

The Experiences of College Students Impacted by COVID-19: Transitions From Traditional Didactic Learning to Online Formats

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The COVID-19 pandemic impacted and transformed the traditional higher educational system. During the rapid transition to online learning environments as a response to public health requirements for social distancing, many college students have struggled with academic challenges while simultaneously coping with personal stressors associated with the balance of school, home, and work. This study seeks to enhance qualitative research focusing on colleges during the COVID-19 pandemic. It explores the experiences of students in traditional academic environments, includes students from underrepresented and diverse populations, and focuses on transitions from traditional didactic learning to online formats. The authors utilized qualitative thematic and summative content analysis as the research methodology. Data were drawn from a survey questionnaire and analyzed for emergent categories. The goal of the study was achieved with the identification of three categories access to equipment, access to instructor, and access to campus resources, in relation to importance and impact on college students. Additionally, the study provided a context to evaluate the basic resources needed for student educational attainment when considering issues related to disability, diversity, and overall student success.

Keywords: COVID-19, higher education, online learning, student retention, student success, disability, diversity

The novel coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) and its lasting impact on the college environment has been enormous. Traditionally, colleges have demonstrated proven success when confronted with the need for adaptability and change. These institutions, having vastly diverse student populations, encompass dynamic systems that have modified and adjusted to everchanging educational situations. With the emerging pandemic, these modifications and adjustments occurred rapidly when colleges moved quickly to convert from traditional didactic learning to both asynchronous and synchronous virtual formats. Historically, colleges have demonstrated improved student success outcomes when there is a provision for online learning opportunities (Allen & Seaman, 2006, 2008, 2013, 2015). In addition, nationwide, the number of students who have continuous enrollment in online courses continues to grow. More than 6.3 million students enrolled in at least one online course in fall 2016, an increase of 5.6 percent from the previous year (Bambara, 2009; Allen & Seaman, 2018). This growth is reflected in research having a focus on the impact of COVID-19 on the student in the college environment. Raaper and Brown (2020) explored the need to comprehend the impact of this shift toward fully online education, and the significant impact on students' abilities for learning, physical well-being, and social interaction. The switch to fully online coursework had a lasting impact, particularly when

considering courses not originally designed for online delivery (Kecojevic et al., 2020). Ghilay (2017) described this academic shift as one influencing student learning experiences and course completion, in the ways in which knowledge is acquired, course engagement and learning activities are achieved, and access is attained to valued academic resources related to student success.

Educational Format During COVID-19

Students in traditional college environments include students come from diverse populations. Each population has varying commitments within and outside academia, making online formats more attractive options for some individuals seeking higher education. Therefore, it is essential that online education considers the overall learning experience and the impact of that experience on the learner. Within these populations are many college students who provide front-line direct care to individuals with COVID-19 (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Travers, 2016; Xu & Jaggars, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2016).

For students wishing to pursue higher education, online formats are attractive options, and, at times, a necessary replacement for face-to-face instruction. In addition, the type of learning environment depends on the way the learner acquires and integrates knowledge and can be categorized according to the amount of control students have over the content and nature of learning (Ghilay 2017; Joshi et al., 2020). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person instruction was the norm for most college courses. These courses were perceived as having the inability to be measured or achieved online (Dill et al., 2020). In traditional didactic learning, content is transmitted in lecture format with enhancements of written material, and accommodations provided in the classroom. Much of this conventional instruction is in direct contrast to the independent learning that occurred in online environments during the pandemic, when students self-determined what and how was learned in a course, and where students were unable to access accommodations and valued resources (Gin et al., 2021). When interacting in online formats, students have the opportunity to select preferred methods of learning, and to engage in dialogue at times convenient for the individual's schedule. Additionally, online courses continue to be a necessity for adult learners when there is a need to maintain a presence in a class without attending in the traditional classroom setting, or without having to adhere to a set schedule. This makes student convenience a key issue in course selection (Huntington-Klein et al., 2017). During this pandemic, there has been rapid growth and change in the delivery method of curriculum, where instructional format and student success continue to be major areas impacting the overall learning experience. (Allen & Seaman, 2013; 2015; Barrett, 2010; Demming & Katz, 2015; Kalinskii, 2015; Mitchell, 2009; Roblyer, 1999; Shea & Bidjerano, 2014, 2016; Travers, 2016; Xu & Jaggars, 2011, 2014).

According to Simonsen et al. (2019), although distance learning provides an excellent resource for online instruction, online academic coursework requires different student capabilities than those necessary to succeed in traditional learning classrooms. In addition, students who indicate a preference to take online courses often are not the same students who will benefit most from this chosen format (Huntington-Klein et al., 2017). Online students, for example, may require extensive self-motivation to learn independently, engage in collaborative interactions with other students, and seek extensive faculty feedback in regard to course learning outcomes. Therefore, in online learning, individual knowledge emerges from direct interactions with others and extensive utilization of technology, which may be in direct contrast to a student's learning style or preference (Dede, 2006; Ghilay, 2017; Travers, 2016). Additionally, changes are noted as extensively altering the learning preference of students with disabilities, when considering those enrolled often require accommodations to facilitate the learning process, thereby influencing learning outcomes for success (Gin et al., 2021).

Student Success and Attrition During COVID-19

Student success outcomes, related to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, are of increasing concern due to shifting demographics, which include increases in nontraditional and underrepresented populations. Recent statistics suggest the number of nontraditional students reached 8.9 million in 2010 rose another 35% to exceed 12 million in 2020 (National Center for Educa-

tion Statistics, 2020). In addition, students with disabilities are a notably underrepresented group making up 26% of the U.S. population, but only 20% of enrollment in higher education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021). Of each of these, about 14% are enrolled in colleges and, by 2026, it is anticipated that 13.3 million nontraditional students will be pursuing a college education (Barrington, 2020). With open enrollment policies at most colleges during this pandemic, these statistics become increasingly important when evaluating the impact of online education and student success in consideration of attrition rates. According to Moss et al (2014), many first-year students emerge from K-12 education underprepared academically for college-level work. In addition, this lack of preparation, along with other personal characteristics related to the COVID-19 pandemic, can impact the learning process negatively, influence attrition rates, and impede completion of academic programs. Low completion rates within programs at the college level, especially in stark contrast to increasing enrollment, raise questions regarding access to higher education and online learning, especially when considering underrepresented populations (Mitchell, 2009; Shea & Bidjerano, 2014; Thomas, 2014).

These same questions arise where the effectiveness of online learning during the pandemic, coupled with the attrition rates in online courses, lead to negative effects for nontraditional students and those with disabilities (Travers, 2016). Given the link between student learning outcomes and online success, many nontraditional and minority students in online courses are documented as having higher levels of dissatisfaction, lack of engagement in the learning process, and negative effects within the college environment. Extensive research by Xu and Jaggars (2011, 2013, 2014) found online learning maintained the potential to be an unrestricted impetus in higher education. However, to accomplish this task, colleges need to monitor the effectiveness of online learning to support underrepresented populations in achieving student success.

Throughout this pandemic, a need emerged to consider the impact of student success in relation to structural and procedural changes made by higher education institutions as they move toward digital transformation. In addition, there is minimal research demonstrating the impact of COVID-19 at the college level on student learning transitions. This study explores the experiences of college students impacted by COVID-19, and their transitions from traditional didactic learning to online formats. Utilizing qualitative summative content analysis, this study explores the divergence and/or commonality of the COVID-19 experience within a group of students located in a college setting in the Southeastern United States.

Methodology

Summative content analysis was selected as the methodology for this study. This approach allowed for considerable attention to the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the contextual meaning given by college students. By utilizing this type of analysis, data may be quantifiable and analyzed for the presence, meanings and relationships of such certain words, themes, or concepts. Meaning emerges as of critical importance when considering events such as COVID-19, and it cannot be separated from the individual as the unit of analysis. Therefore, the goal of utilizing the summative content analysis approach was to go beyond merely counting words, to providing interpretation of the experiences of college students impacted by COVID-19, and their transitions from traditional didactic learning to online formats.

Ethics

Approval for this study was received from the Institutional Research Board at East Tennessee State University, the site of the questionnaire (IRB#20-16). Consent was implied with the return of the completed survey. All responses were kept in strict confidentiality, and all data collected were de-identified in reporting. Electronic data was housed on secure servers located in the college Office of Planning, Research and Assessment. When being utilized by the researchers (both on and off campus), printed documents with identifiable information were housed in a locked file cabinet.

Participant Recruitment

A total of 5,213 current students were eligible to participate in the college COVID-19 questionnaire utilized in this study. This study employed a simple random sampling approach where every student in the population had an even chance, and likelihood, of being selected into the sample. The selection of students was based on the individual having the same probability of being chosen out of the overall college population.

Survey

An online questionnaire was designed and refined, then presented in an open invitation directly from the college to all students. The quantitative portion of the questionnaire consisting of 14 fixed-response questions, and 5 open-ended questions provided rich and relevant data for qualitative thematic and summative content analysis. Each student received the survey invitation via their official college email. In addition, throughout this request for survey completion, follow-up was conducted to encourage diversity in representation.

Data collection occurred between March 2020 and May 2020 (during the COVID-19 pandemic), and the data involved information presented by individual students in regard to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey allowed for interpretation to include social constructs, ideas, and a combination of student views related to transitioning from traditional didactic learning to online formats during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Analysis

Creswell & Poth (2018) describe the contour of data analysis as a spiral image or data analysis spiral. In order to analyze the data, researchers engaged in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than a fixed linear approach. Data was entered and exited with an account or narrative. In between the beginning of the analysis process, and the discovery of the essence of the experience, the researchers focus on several aspects of analysis to include summative content analysis.

In addition, this analytic approach, commonly utilized for open-ended survey questions, afforded the opportunity to examine interrelated dimensions of meaning, and interpretation of the experience by focusing on the subjective interpretation of the content of the data through the systematic process of coding and identifying categories and themes (Creswell, 1998; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Moustakas, 1994). Independently, the researchers read the text to identify key words from the responses to be placed into categories and subcategories. This approach was most suitable as responses were often in single word and short-answer formats. The emergent categories and subcategories allowed for further exploration and interpretation. Finally, the researchers compared individually identified categories in order to establish validity and internal consistency by demonstrating the textual evidence consistent with the interpretation.

Results

Demographic Characteristics

A total of 1610 students (31% of total eligible participants) completed the online coronavirus student survey. Of those who completed the online survey, this study explores a subgroup of 533 participants (33%) which responded to the five open-ended questions located throughout the survey. Demographic data were analyzed utilizing descriptive frequencies according to the student body population of the college with information including gender, race/ethnicity, status and age provided in .

Table 1*Demographic and Status Information. Actual sample (n=533)*

	N	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	192	36.0
Female	341	64.0
<i>Status</i>		
First-Time Freshman	15	2.8
Other Freshman	169	31.7
Pre-College	129	24.2
Sophomore	205	38.4
Undergraduate Special	15	2.8
<i>Age</i>		
Adult (25+)	133	24.9
Traditional (18-24)	298	55.9
Under 18	101	18.9
Other	1	0.1
<i>Race</i>		
White	440	82.5
Hispanic/Latino	38	7.1
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	0.4
Black/African American	8	1.5
Asian	9	1.7
American Indian	3	0.6
Alaskan Native	1	0.1
Multi	30	5.6
Unknown	1	0.1
Non-Resident Alien	1	0.1

Categories and Subcategories

Participants provided a rich account of their student success experiences as students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three primary categories emerged as central to the overall experience: access to equipment, access to instructor, and access to campus resources. Three subcategories formed the overall components of each primary category. These categories are listed in Figure 1.

Category One: Access to Equipment

Overwhelmingly the concept of *access to equipment* emerged from the data. The need for students to have access to hardware, to include computers (laptop or desktop) and printers, was noted by 54.6% of participants. In addition, many students expressed the need for additional supplies that created financial burdens to success due to the transition from traditional to online format. For example:

Figure 1
Categories and Sub-categories

Categories and sub-categories



- “I need a reliable computer and printer which at home is not available to me” (521)
- “TI-83 calculator and printer, ink, and paper” (27)
- “I do not have a way to print off study materials” (166)
- “I need a computer, but I can’t afford one right now. I didn’t take online classes for a reason” (279)

Additionally, emphasis was placed on the need for students to have access to software and effectively utilize programs such as Zoom and Teams (24.3%) in order to be successful in the online academic environment. Furthermore, many students, though literate in personal software applications such as Snapchat and TikTok, described a lack of knowledge surrounding how to effectively utilize different software packages for educational purposes with some referring to the need to return to textbooks, as demonstrated by:

- “One class is using Microsoft Teams and that seems easier than our class using Zoom” (281)
- “I don’t get it, why can’t we just use something a bit easier, I need help as this just doesn’t make sense” (379)
- “Assign textbooks. I need textbooks not only online PowerPoints in Teams.” (50)
- “Though they are expensive, books for class now that they are all online” (115)

Others recognized a deterrent to their educational attainment and student success when there was limited to no access to the internet on campus (27.7%). Students expressed the difficulties experienced in finding and maintaining access to reliable internet resources. Two students provided summative statements that reflected the issues surrounding the impact of monetary cost related to internet needed for online learning, and the damage it created when considering equal opportunity and access:

- “Technology should be available for those who do not have it, if they want us to complete an in-person class online. I was not and cannot afford to be purchasing technology items for one semester.” (165)

- “Using a mobile hotspot or internet connection is expensive. For a lot of us, that’s the only option we have. Our grades are more dependent on access than equal opportunity. I have to miss online class meetings because they rack up my data charge” (287)

Category Two: Access to Instructor

A second category of *access to instructor* was identified and emphasized by participants. Overall, there emerged a category focusing on the necessity to have access to the instructor through personal and/or face-to-face interactions. This need was determined by the lack of perceived interaction available to students when moving from traditional on ground (face-to-face) instruction to fully online coursework. Many participants statements reflected how they carefully selected on ground coursework in order to interact with faculty, and their frustrations surrounding the loss of that personal interaction during the shift to fully online environments during the COVID-19 pandemic (26.8%):

- “Actual teachers in person and not through videos chats and notifications is what I need” (264)
- “In person help, emailing isn’t helping me and neither is calling” (269)
- “To be in person for class and on campus. Being forced to go online is unfair” (13)
- “Class meeting. I didn’t sign up for online classes.” (66)

Additionally, respondents identified needs for comprehensive faculty feedback as influencing their positive progression in the online learning environment (48.2%). Overall, participants suggested that there was a great deal of confusion related to instructions, assignments, and timelines for project submission. Several participants spoke of the need for better explanation of expectations, faculty flexibility with assignments, and detailed guidance regarding work such as the following:

- “Better instructions that are not confusing and faster replies to emails” (11)
- “More help and feedback from teachers” (24)
- “I need detailed guidance about this work” (119)
- “Understanding and teachers that don’t assign more work just because of the assumption we now have more time” (204)

A final subcategory emphasizing the need for communication between student and faculty (25%) emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic transition to online learning. Several participants discussed their desires to have increased communication with faculty when problems arose in the online learning environment, and provided insight into the need of students to have open communication with faculty. For example:

- “A better way of getting notifications about emails and other things. Communication-I need it.” (104)
- “I need a teacher that will communicate back and help” (183)
- “More clear communication-PLEASE!!” (400)
- “Students are being put into the situation where they must teach themselves. When students have to teach themselves it creates issues. That’s when we need to talk to them the most.” (497)

Category Three: Access to Campus Resources

A final primary category to emerge related to *access to campus resources*. Institutional support in the area of tutoring services was identified by 25% of students, with many students citing the academic impact of the loss of on-campus tutors due to the transition to the online learning environment:

- “I miss going to tutoring help for homework, it helped and now I am failing math” (126)
- “I need tutoring resources. Through facetime is fine with me” (299)

- “More help? Free tutoring services to better understand certain material” (406)

Of additional concern, students provided supplementary comments suggesting the need for campus lab space (14%) and on-ground classrooms (61%) such as:

- “The online thing is not very reliable when you do not have access to the classroom, library or face to face demonstrations. I am humble enough to say I am struggling” (370)
- “I need to come back and have classes with my instructors. I do not learn well online that is why I come to campus” (398)
- “I cannot progress in my engineering classes because the electronics and automation equipment is in the lab. You cannot learn hands on skills from a computer screen” (277)
- “I had labs that we were doing stuff, and cannot do that and I’m worried about getting caught up on everything now” (95)

A significant impact was noted in the emerging, and ever-present, statements surrounding the effect on academic achievement without access to campus resources. Many students expressed struggling to attain academic success such as:

- “Actual face-to-face school in the classroom. I am surprised I am passing this semester” (288)
- “Actual teachers in person, and not through video chats and notifications. I miss my classroom and my grades” (264)
- “How about an actual CLASS, rhymes with PASS” (385)

One student brought a powerful summative to this section by sharing her need for multiple campus resources, while additionally providing a glance into what many are experiencing with the dichotomy of the roles of parent and student during the COVID-19 pandemic:

“My house is far too hectic to study in. I need a library on campus I can escape to. I also do so much better in an on-campus setting and classroom. Not much gets done at home, as I have four kids, and I am mom, student and more.” (114)

Discussion

Online learning continues to be an essential source of instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, many students struggle with overall academic difficulties while simultaneously having personal stressors associated with the balance of school, home, and work. This study sought to explore the experiences of college students impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and their transitions from traditional didactic learning to online formats. The open-ended questions provided rich data regarding students’ experiences, and extends our current understanding of the convergence of varying aspects of the academic environment related to student success during COVID-19. Within each primary category, students’ voiced experiences provide insight into the need of valued resources, and opportunities, to enhance student academic achievement and overall retention.

According to Phillip and Garcia (2013) there continues to be a naïve belief among educators that technological devices are available to every student. The emergent category of access to equipment brought to the forefront the need to consider this common fallacy surrounding student computer availability, comprehension of educational software packages, and availability and/or access to reliable internet. Providing access to valued electronic resources emerged as important to academic self-efficacy, where lack of available equipment appeared as a deterrent to academic success when moving from on ground to online learning environments during COVID-19.

Additionally, the importance of the role of the instructor and the classroom learning environment characterized as the physical and instructional setting of the student, influenced the student experience. Teacher support has been well-documented to influence academic achievement (Thomas, 2014). The emergent category of access to instructor strengthens this body of work and provides additional

insight into the impact of course setting (online or on-ground) on overall student feeling of academic achievement. Students who perceive the online course instructor as having open communication, providing timely feedback and having equitable treatment for all students are noted as having a higher likelihood for retention and to complete college (Alvarez & Mehan, 2006; Thomas, 2014). This study lends support to this body of work, and provides supplementation of the power of student perception and influence it has over academic retention.

Research defines perceived institutional support as a critical consideration when contemplating student retention (Thomas, 2014). Students have diverse perceptions of the academic experience, and even greater diversity in perception surrounding support from the institution. Research suggests college culture, which shapes the way in which emotions are experienced and expressed, plays a crucial role during changes within the academic environment (Mitchell, 2009; Smoller & Sayers, 2009). Though studies suggest students appreciate distance education opportunities provided by colleges, a desire to return to traditional academic settings is noted, where on ground resources are readily accessible (Rizum & Strzelecki, 2020). This research, not only is a valuable contribution for consideration by colleges if the COVID-19 pandemic continues to force institutions of higher education to work online, but is reflective of the impact that lack of access to campus resources has on the social and emotional needs of students at all levels.

Implications for Transition and Rehabilitation Professionals

When considering the emergence of these significant categories, there is a direct impact on students with disabilities in transition or currently attending institutions of higher education. Students with disabilities are more likely than their nondisabled counterparts to have their lives significantly altered by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, when considering the transition to digital formats, this group of students is left without access to valued resources and accommodations that are traditionally offered during a normal academic year (i.e., academic tutoring, accommodations such as notetakers, reduced distraction testing environments, and extended time on test). This lack of resources, coupled with a lack of access to the instructor, may create a stressful environment where students with disabilities experience new challenges to the already difficult transition to online formats. Students with disabilities undoubtedly would benefit from all available technology, instructor knowledge, and campus resources working together to enhance the educational experience.

Effective communication is key in working through any crisis or transition. This statement resonates with rehabilitation professionals working in general and specialty caseloads who maximize effective teamwork in an ever-changing landscape. It is in this partnership where student and practitioner are challenged to keep an open mind, and where various options which might lead to greater success are explored. This exploration encompasses aspects of empowerment through instruction in self-advocacy and determining overall needs as a team by utilizing effective case management strategies. The emphasis on understanding disability, and using a team-based approach is not unique in the field of rehabilitation. However, during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, rehabilitation professionals have demonstrated unique sets of skills that have supported the ongoing successful transition of students with disabilities.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Limitations

As this study is summative in nature, it does not provide theories or results that may be over-generalized to a broader population. The reader must, independently, examine the findings, utilize the context, and evaluate the relevance when considering students in the college setting. This study was intended to provide a beginning for future research related to the impact of students' experiences of transition to online learning environments during the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal of the study was achieved with the identification of three categories: access to equipment, access to instructor, and ac-

cess to campus resources, and their importance to college students. Additionally, the study provided implications for colleges in relation to academic supports and services. However, further research is needed to explore each category for richer and deeper meaning. Since sampling was limited, based on the demographic and regional characteristics of the population, further research is needed to include increased diversity, and expand geographic regions, in order to gain further insight into the impact of student perception of the online academic transition during COVID-19 on retention and college completion.

Recommendations

Since the academic environment has changed unequivocally with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, recommendations for future practice emerge for institutions of higher education. Colleges must evaluate the basic resources needed for student educational attainment and success. For students lacking valued at-home technology resources such as computers, printers, and accessible Wi-Fi, colleges must increase opportunities for coursework support via equipment loan with wireless network capability for student borrowers. Increased accessibility requires purchases of equipment, and additional funding,

Student Recommendations

Student training, with a focus on utilization of software tools, is suggested for students entering the college environment. Students need awareness of access and utilization of the college preferred software platform in order to support flexibility with varying modes of delivery during times of crisis or disaster. In addition, all students, especially those with disabilities, must self-advocate for the resources needed to be successful in the educational environment. Throughout this study it became clear that software tools readily available on college campuses were not automatically accessible when students were fully integrated to online formats. In addition, students needing valued accommodations which supported student growth while in a traditional didactic environment were often lacking in availability once there was a shift to a fully online format. Therefore, communication and self-advocacy are vital to successful student outcomes, especially when considering such dynamic shifts to online learning.

Faculty Recommendations

The role and function of faculty have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Colleges must continue ongoing enhancement of the knowledge base of faculty through professional training tracks which emphasize the ever-changing needs of virtual learners. Participation in professional development activities that promote best practice in online learning environments enhance instructor skills, and strengthen guidance and leadership skills utilized in working with students. Therefore, faculty development needs to be intentional, with the incorporation of technology into teaching and learning. Additionally, faculty should be aware of alternate ways to accommodate students in online formats and may need to become more creative in the ways in which they support students and their educational needs in the virtual world.

College Administration Recommendations

College administrators must plan for changes that have emerged due to COVID-19. Consideration should be given to updating or creating emergency preparedness plans which incorporate topics of pandemic leadership, accessibility of critical information, response procedures, and simulations. Implementation of an educational delivery system allows students, and faculty, the ability to move fluidly between multiple or single modes of delivery during times of crisis or disaster. Finally, ongoing assessment provides guidance in the decision-making process, which in turn, determines future frameworks and approaches. Academic administrators must be aware of the need to define institu-

tional expectations during emergency, while simultaneously maintaining the support necessary for faculty and students to meet shifting educational obligations with success.

Resilience and adaptability will be key elements in the college of the future. The COVID-19 pandemic has generated transformation of the traditional higher educational system. Now is the time for colleges, emerging from the impact of COVID-19, to be the catalyst for change incorporating educational responsiveness to community through opportunity, providing focus on equitable distribution of resources, and in maintaining accessibility by removing barriers to educational attainment and success.

Rehabilitation Professional Recommendations

The field of rehabilitation has been changed at all levels by the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has provided a picture into who we are as a profession, and how we respond to the situation in which we are operating. All areas of practice including case/caseload management, vocational evaluation and assessment, plan formation, employment and placement have been impacted by the restrictions of the stay-at-home orders placed on practitioners at all levels. Definitions of the terms “rehabilitation” and “rehabilitation success” in public and private sectors continue to emerge during post COVID-19 pandemic discussions.

Rehabilitation practitioners and administrators must plan for changes that have emerged due to COVID-19. Consideration needs to be given to updating or creating emergency preparedness plans which incorporate topics of pandemic leadership, accessibility of critical information, response procedures, and simulations. Incorporation and implementation of an external case management delivery system needs to be considered in allowing clients, rehabilitation practitioners and staff, the ability to move fluidly between multiple or single modes of delivery during times of crisis or disaster. Finally, ongoing assessment provides guidance in the decision-making process, which in turn, determines future frameworks and approaches. Rehabilitation administrators must be aware of the need to define institutional expectations during emergency, while simultaneously maintaining the support necessary for practitioners and staff to meet shifting personal and professional obligations with success. Inconsistent, non-goal-directed performances can usually be traced to poorly constructed definitions which professionals are left to construct on their own overtime. During times of crisis, it becomes a prerequisite to change workplace definitions in order to alter performance to include productive, effective practices. Finally, providing changes to these definitions is often sufficient to gain higher levels of achievement from professionals in the field, as there emerges a clear and precise understanding of the goals and priorities of the agency with a meshing of personal responsibility to the achieve the overall mission of supporting individuals with disabilities.

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