PERCEPTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS ON THE UTILITY OF THE ACTIVITIES, PROGRAMS, OR POLICIES TOOL TO PROMOTE SELF-DETERMINATION FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

Self-determination has been associated with academic success for college students with and without disabilities. The APP Tool was designed to allow higher education professionals to examine which campus Activities, Programs, or Policies (APPs) promote, and which might hinder, the development of student self-determination. This study used the qualitative basic interpretive approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to analyze data from semi-structured interviews of three focus groups of higher education professionals (practitioners) that were conducted to ascertain their impressions of the utility of the tool. Use of the APP Tool led practitioners to reflect on what self-determination included and what campus efforts were currently fostering these skills. Implications of the APP Tool included use as (1) a progress monitoring tool for student self-determination skills and (2) an evaluation tool for current campus programming.

Postsecondary education has required students to set both small (e.g., achieve adequate grades on assignments and exams) and large (e.g., complete classes and academic degrees) goals, as well as independently self-regulate their behavior to enable this progress. As such self- determination, a concept that embodies these skills, is noted as critical for all postsecondary students. Field et al. (1998) proposed the following description of self-determination:

Self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, autonomous behavior. An understanding of one's strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination. When acting on the basis of these skills and attitudes, individuals have greater ability to take control of their lives and assume the role of successful adults in our society (p. 2).

Wehmeyer et al. (2007) stated self-determined behaviors encompass "volitional actions" (p. 5) that allow individuals to make choices and direct their behaviors to maintain or alter their lives. The volitional actions that describe self-determination included four essential characteristics: (1) the person acted autonomously; (2) the behavior was self-regulated; (3) the person initiated and responded to the event in a psychologically empowered manner; and (4) the person acted in a self-realizing manner. These characteristics described the function of the behavior that makes it self-determined or not (Wehmeyer et al., 2007). Volitional actions can also be achieved through the development of related attitudes and abilities, or the component elements of self-determination. Definitions of the component elements of self-determination can be found in Appendix A.

Self-determination is noted as an important skill for all students in postsecondary education (Faye & Sharpe, 2008; Graham & Vaughn, 2022; Guiffrida et al., 2013). Specifically, increased levels of self-determination have been associated with higher grade point averages (GPAs) and levels of satisfaction with life in college for all postsecondary students (Graham & Vaughn, 2022), as well as higher rates of student engagement in postsecondary education (Faye & Sharpe, 2008; Guiffrida et al., 2013). For postsecondary students, Guiffrida et al. (2013) also found a relationship between source of motivation, specifically in areas of autonomy and competence, and persistence in postsecondary education as well as GPA.

The benefits of learning and using self-determination skills for college students with disabilities (SWD) have also been well established (Field et al., 2003; Gelbar et al., 2020; Ju et al., 2017; D.R. Parker, 2004; Petcu et al., 2017; Sarver, 2000). Researchers have found positive relationships between GPA in postsecondary education and levels of self-determination for students with learning disabilities (Field et al., 2003; Sarver, 2000) and for students with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (D.R. Parker, 2004). Ju et al. (2017) found that "teaching self- determination skills or developing self-determined behaviors can enhance overall self-determination leading to academic success" (p. 186), including higher GPA and retention rates for postsecondary SWD.

Self-determination may have been even more crucial for SWD, as accommodation provision is largely reliant on students' proactive behaviors. Postsecondary disability services required SWD to self-disclose their disability or disabilities to their office and professors as needed to receive accommodations (Fleming et al., 2017; Newman & Madaus,

2015; O'Shea & Meyer, 2016). Depending on campus policies students have also needed to request accommodations every semester, deliver or initiate delivery of accommodation letters to their instructors, and follow-up with disability resource personnel or instructors themselves if they required a change in accommodations.

While self-determination is relevant to all postsecondary students, especially those with disabilities, the topic is less researched for students without disabilities. In these settings, self-determination skill development most commonly occurred within disability resource offices (University of California Berkley, n.d.; University of Colorado Boulder, n.d.; University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, n.d.); however, this programming only reached students with disabilities, specifically those who chose to disclose and register for services. As only one third of postsecondary students with disabilities registered with disability resource offices (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022), this information reached a relatively small number of students with disabilities. Gelbar et al. (2020) called attention to the fact that not all students register with their disability service office, and students may have invisible disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, mental health conditions), therefore student affairs professionals may have served students with undisclosed disabilities. Providing opportunities to practice self-determination through both disability resource and student affairs offices could reach a broader population of students with disabilities than through disability resource offices alone. Additionally, self-determination training provided through student affairs offices could reach the general population of college students who may also benefit from these skills.

There has been a need to ensure higher education programing promoted self-determination skills for all students. This included identifying and continuing current programs that effectively cultivate these skills, modifying or eliminating programs that do not effectively develop self- determination, and developing new programs to support skills not being fostered. The Activities, Programs, or Policies (APP) Tool (Mills et al., 2019) provided a systematic means to evaluate whether self-determination skills are supported by campus programming. The APP Tool, which consisted of a three-column form that can be used as a hard-copy or electronic resource, was developed to provide postsecondary professionals, including those within student affairs and disability resource offices, with a guide to foster a campus-wide focus on self-determination skill development. APPs was a broad term used for this tool to signify the various components of higher education, though there is much overlap, and the area or event does not need to fit into one silo. Broadly, activities included activities fairs and new student orientation that are single events or occur less frequently, while programs included first year seminars and intramurals that are structured across a longer period of time. Policies included codes of conduct and attendance rules. The tool did not require users to define an event as an activity, program, or policy but instead identify the whole event, examples provided above, as an APP.

DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF THE APP TOOL

Mills et al. (2019) created the APP Tool for student affairs professionals to facilitate the development of self-determination skills. The APP Tool can be employed in a range of higher education settings and provides professionals a way to "identify self-determination

challenges common to college students and link them to programmatic responses" (Madaus et al., 2020, p. 3). It is completed in a series of reflective steps (described next). Although not necessary, the form can be completed collaboratively, with higher education professionals initially working through each step and then discussing and modifying their responses as a group throughout each stage.

The APP tool (see Appendix B) contained three columns: "Common Challenges,"

"Activities, Policies, Programs" and "Self-Determination Outcomes." The first step when completing the APP Tool was to list common challenges incoming students, including both first year and transfer students, may face on a separate sheet of paper. This section could also be used to describe common challenges that historically marginalized populations, including, but not limited to, first generation students, SWDs, minority students, and economically challenged students experienced when they enter postsecondary education (Madaus et al., 2020). It should be noted these categories were not discrete, and individual students may identify with more than one challenge.

Next, higher education professionals using the tool would narrow the list to five to seven of the most pressing common challenges for students and record these in the first column of the Tool. If professionals listed more than seven challenges, they should focus on five to seven to ensure enough time is available to think critically about each challenge. They may choose to examine additional challenges with the Tool at a later point in time. These common challenges did not need to be relevant to the entire student population but should encompass issues experienced most frequently by the students currently under consideration when completing the APP Tool. Users then recorded the most impactful five to seven activities, policies, and programs (APPs) offered at their school, which can include the most frequent, most popular, or effective APPs as determined by their institution of higher education. Note that these, can, but do not have to be related to the common challenges listed in the first column.

After APPs have been identified, users can familiarize themselves with a numbered list of 12 specific self-determination outcomes, which are based on the component elements of self- determination (Appendix A), noted at the bottom of the APP Tool form. The self-determination outcomes included the following: (1) choice-making skills, (2) decision-making skills, (3) problem- solving skills, (4) goal setting and attainment skills, (5) independence, risk-taking, and safety skills, (6) self- observation, self-awareness or self-monitoring skills, (7) self-evaluation skills, (8) self-reinforcement skills, (9) self-instruction skills, (10) self-regulation-skills, (11) self-advocacy and leadership skills, and (12) positive attributions of efficacy and outcome expectancy skills. Using this list as a guide, professionals then identified what self-determination outcomes the specified APPs address and indicated the related self-determination outcomes in the third column, as determined by group discussion among the users filling out the APP Tool. The final step of the APP Tool process was to triangulate the data by (a) determining which APPs provide the most support in teaching self-determination skills, (b) determining which APPs provide limited or no support in teaching self-determination skills, and (c) identifying the self-determination skills not being developed by current APPs, which can inform the development of new or modified APPs to foster these skills. It was also possible to identify whether specific APPs hinder the development of student self-determination based on

whether the APP does not address any of the noted challenges or if there are no self-determination outcomes that can be identified for the APP.

The current study examined the reactions of postsecondary student affairs and disability services professionals to using the APP Tool and addressed the following research questions:

1. Does the APP Tool help focus group participants consider self-determination in relation to their work?

2. In what ways could focus group participants see themselves using the APP Tool in their work?

3. What do participant responses tell us about the utility of the APP tool in higher education settings?

4. What recommendations do focus group participants have for improving the APP Tool?

METHODS

The researchers sought to learn what student support services professionals, including student affairs professionals and disability resource office professionals, in higher education thought about the utility, benefits, and drawbacks of using the APP Tool. To do this, we conducted three focus groups with a total of 30 postsecondary education professionals across all groups. Focus groups are established as an accepted practice in a variety of fields, including business, medicine, and the social sciences to evaluate new tools, measure the effects of interventions, and gain perspectives from a variety of users (A. Parker & Tritter, 2006). They provided a vehicle to gain a deeper understanding than a purely quantitative analysis may offer and provide a social setting to evaluate attitudes and opinions towards the topic or item of interest (Breen, 2006). As such, they have been used to support the development, evaluation, and assessment of tools in the field of education (Williams & Katz, 2001).

Conducting focus groups has also been noted as a common approach to collect qualitative data in postsecondary education research (Ortiz & Waterman, 2016), as open-ended questions are used to gain multiple "perspectives from a group that shares one or more characteristics," (Biddix, 2018, p. 146). This method prompts participants to respond to individual questions, as well as engage in conversations with each other, which can "reveal group dynamics and social processes," and "check for shared understanding" (Biddix, 2018, p. 146). Focus groups have been previously used to study topics in higher education. Specifically, Murphrey et al. (2014) used focus groups to assess the effectiveness of different teaching platforms used at the college level and Sangster et al. (2016) used this method to evaluate undergraduate student involvement in research.

PARTICIPANTS & SETTING

As noted, three focus groups were held with a total of 30 postsecondary education professionals in multiple regions in the United States. We intentionally sought participants from a combination of disability resource and student affairs professionals in order to represent the range of individuals who work with SWD (Lalor et al., 2020; Madaus et al., 2020), but also to glean if they believed the APP Tool had utility in other functions of student affairs work. The first group was held during a national conference on postsecondary disability services and consisted of ten postsecondary disability services professionals who represented an even mix of two-year colleges, small four-year colleges, and large four-year universities. The second and third groups, conducted at two different large four-year universities in the south and southeast United States, each included ten student affairs professionals, including residential life, advising, and veterans' affairs staff, from the institution at which each group was held. The focus group participants were convenient samples of individuals who either chose to attend a conference session or were university staff at an institution the focus group facilitator worked for, though in a different department, and chose to attend the session. Given that each group had a sample size of ten participants they met the requirement of ten participants per focus group suggested by Krueger (1994). In a review of focus groups, it was found that 90% of themes were identified when there were three to six focus groups, with three being the most common number of focus groups (Guest et al., 2017), therefore using three focus groups in this study was appropriate given current literature. Additionally, when analyzing the data, saturation was reached indicating a sufficient number of participants was sampled (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

FOCUS GROUP FORMAT

Participants in each group were invited to participate via email and each comprised a convenience sample, which is defined here as participants that were interested in the topic and chose to attend the focus group sessions. The disability service professionals were recruited from a conference session that participants had the option to attend if interested. The student affairs professionals were offered the opportunity to attend the focus groups at their respective institutions. The groups were led by one to two of the APP Tool developers, who served as moderators. Following the approved institutional review board (IRB) protocol, each moderator explained the focus group purpose, informed participants the sessions were recorded, that participation was voluntary, and their identity would remain anonymous. At that time, participants could decide if they wished to participate in the focus group or not. If an individual chose to stay for the focus group, that indicated they provided consent. The four creators of the tool, who also served as the focus group moderators, came together to create the focus group protocol. The moderators all had a copy of the protocol which they followed during the focus groups. The moderators began each session with a 10-to-15-minute overview of self- determination based upon the theoretical framework presented by Field et al. (1998) and other relevant literature on the topic, notably the key components of self-determination and how its development can affect postsecondary students. The moderators next presented the APP Tool and asked participants to collaborate in order to complete it. It was suggested

that participants evaluate the APPs at their own institution when possible. They also had the option to discuss APPs at the institution of other participants if that was preferred. Participants worked in self-chosen groups for approximately 20 minutes. Moderators then lead each group in a discussion and reflection of the utility of the tool. Each focus group lasted between 60-90 minutes in entirety.

Discussions utilized semi-structured interview questions (see Table 1). Questions were generated based upon feedback in previous presentations of the APP Tool at two national student affairs conferences. During these conference sessions, themes emerged from participants' reactions and feedback, which served as the foundation for the interview questions. The semi-structured interview format allowed the moderators to guide the conversation with pre-prepared general questions and to ask follow-up questions as appropriate. This approach to interviewing can be useful when researchers seek to collect information on a similar topic across settings and enabled participants to express their individualized experience with the topic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Table 1

Semi-Structured Focus Group Interview Questions

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1) How do the components of self-determination fit with students with disabilities? With other diverse populations of students? With students in general?

2) How could these skills be learned by students to help them be successful in college

3) What specific university activities, programs and policies could relate to development of student self-determination and how?

4) What did you learn by using the tool about your university activities, programs and policies?

5) How would this help you in your work? How might it be changed to better help you in your work?

DATA ANALYSIS

The focus group recordings were transcribed, and transcripts were later analyzed using a basic interpretive approach in order to describe, understand, and interpret the participants' experiences. In this process, data were analyzed by identifying recurring patterns, including initial codes, which are grouped into larger categories, and then interpreted to reveal overall themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This method was chosen as it is a common method in qualitative research and the authors' goal was to determine the overall themes across participants. The first two authors conducted data analysis for this

study. These two authors were graduate students studying higher education and disability, previously worked in positions serving students with disabilities in higher education, and both self-identify as individuals with disabilities. The first two authors completed close readings of the focus group transcripts to familiarize themselves with the data. Next, each independently generated initial codes in the form of themes, or words, that captured the units of meaning within participants' accounts (Thomas, 2006). Next, the two researchers met to discuss initial codes and resolve any discrepancies. Discrepancies were determined by comparing the researcher's initial codes and identifying those that have different meanings. Discussion between the two researchers occurred until they came to an agreement on the final list of initial codes. After this meeting, the researchers independently examined the codes and sought to make sense of them through identifying similarities, complements, or patterns. Initial codes were grouped together based on if focus group participants were discussing the same or similar ideas. This process resulted in the development of categories, which were collectively analyzed by the two researchers to identify emerging themes. Themes were described as overarching ideas that encapsulate participants' experiences into a meaningful whole. After establishing themes, the researchers assessed their validity through the examination of initial codes to ensure the themes were representative of the initial data. This process was conducted to ensure that all data present in the initial codes were sufficiently and appropriately reflected in the final themes.

SELF-DETERMINATION AND DISABILITY CRITICAL THEORY

Disability critical theory (Schalk, 2017) guided the coding and analysis process. Specifically, as we completed the analyses for this study, we examined the findings through thinking about how the assessments of the APP tool could help benefit individuals in higher education who do not fit the standard norms, including students with disabilities. To do so we used disability critical theory which defines disability as "socially constructed system of norms which categorizes and values bodyminds based on concepts of ability and disability" (Schalk, 2017, p. 1), with bodyminds indicating the overlap a person's body and mind. Disability critical theory focuses on viewing disability through the various social systems put in place and their impact on individuals with disability, as well as acknowledging other social systems such as race and ethnicity (Schalk, 2017. This theory was the strongest choice for this study given that the goal of the APP tool was to help institutions of higher education foster self-determination and identify areas that may hinder self-determination. Through using disability critical race theory, the participant responses were viewed in reference to the whole campus unless otherwise specified, instead of just being relevant to a disability service office, as people with disabilities should be supported by all campus offices. This was reflected in discussions of cross-campus collaboration and aligned with the view that self-determination was necessary for the full population of college students.

CREDIBILITY MEASURES

The researchers established credibility, or trustworthiness, of the research process in multiple ways. First, researcher triangulation, or the use of multiple investigators comparing findings throughout data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was used. This supported credibility as the data was not being analyzed by a single individual but by multiple individuals with varied life experiences. Second, we recorded an audit trail, or a thorough description of our analysis process to make these steps transparent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Third, this manuscript also included rich descriptions, as well as the participants' direct quotes, to support the findings of the study.

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

The two researchers who performed the interpretive analysis both approached this task from the position of former postsecondary education disability resource professionals, as well as former graduate-level SWDs. They were both also actively involved with student

Table 2

Examples of APPs and Self-Determination Skills

APP	Self-Determination skill
Study abroad, student organization fair, first year-experience, advising office, career planning office/fair	Choice making, decision making, problem solving, leadership skills, self-knowledge, self-awareness
First-year experience, financial literacy class	Independence, risk taking, safety, goal setting and attainment
Student code of conduct/conduct meetings	All self-determination + self-awareness
Mental health services, residence assistant support	Self-regulation
Mental health services, peer mentoring, Wellness Center, residence assistant support	Self-efficacy
Military, Veterans Affairs Offices, Multicultural Affairs	Self-advocacy, connecting activities

advocacy groups for undergraduate SWDs. As these experiences had the potential to influence their analysis of the data, both were intentional to acknowledge and recognize these positionalities and put in place three checks, explained above, among researchers throughout the research process to ensure the trustworthiness of findings.

RESULTS

Several themes were generated from the focus group data surrounding participants' use of the APP Tool during the focus group sessions. Themes included that the tool (a) helped to identify APPs that both fostered and hindered development of self-determination, (b) guided professionals and students to focus on self-determination skill development, (c) can have multiple uses and implications, (d) facilitated collaboration among diverse campus offices, and (e) suggestions for revisions to the tool. Participants in two of the groups reflected on their experiences before discussing their impressions of the tool itself. The participants claimed the tool helped them reflect on which APPs fostered self-determination. Participants debated how the APPs may foster the self-determination concepts, as well as how various programs can target the same skills, thus reinforcing their development and value. Table 2 provides a summary of self-determination components and related campus APPs as discussed by participants. For example, participants noted the APPs of mental health services and residence assistant support to promote self-regulation.

RELEVANCE TO PARTICIPANT WORK

Focus group participants discussed the relevance of the APP Tool to their work including fostering self-determination and hindering self-determination. These topics are discussed subsequently.

FOSTERING SELF-DETERMINATION

Focus group participants noted value in the opportunity to examine current campus APPs, specifically whether they are meeting their intended goals, and whether those goals also reflect the development and use of self-determination skills. One participant shared, "What I found as helpful is you can look at which outcomes we may not be hitting." Moreover, participants discussed how APPs that are intended to foster self-determination are developed constantly in higher education settings; however, strategic ways to assess if goals are achieved may not exist. One participant envisioned using the APP Tool to assess whether programs met intended objectives:

Okay, this is what we hoped for, but what actually is this program hitting and what actually is this program not hitting? And kind of comparing the [program at the beginning of the year to the program at the end of the year] to figure out how we can improve something or get rid of something, honestly, if it's not doing what we want it to do.

Others felt the APP Tool can be used to ensure students receive opportunities for skill development. One participant stated:

If we're complaining about how we see students aren't leaving our institution with a certain thing, where is this missing from our programs or what programs is it in that our students aren't taking part in and how can we get them wrapped in?

Another participant added that program goals also needed to match student expectations; if students are expected to graduate with certain self-determination skills, it is imperative these skills are explicitly taught. She noted:

It's like if we identify the outcomes, if we're seeing like a gap missing in whatever we're doing—say it's problem-solving skills … That's the outcome that we're trying to really focus in on, and then we're going to structure it. What kind of program do we want? How are we assessing that or even reaching that outcome? And then how can we structure in that manner?

Most participants agreed using the APP Tool would reveal where programs were lacking self-determination components. One participant said, "I like the tool just because it offers you an aerial view of what it is that you're missing." Participants discussed how well-intentioned APPs, whether newly developed or carried on from previous years, may not clearly articulate the self-determination skills addressed. They felt the APP Tool helped them to deliberately consider what concepts needed to be honed in APPs.

HINDERING SELF-DETERMINATION

Members of all three groups shared the APP Tool helped them identify APPs that hindered and highlighted self-determination skills not yet specifically addressed by resources on their campuses. Importantly, group discussants reflected that APPs limiting student choice may work against the development of self-determination. For instance, "Progression Policies" encourage students to complete a certain number of courses in a specified amount of time or limit a student's ability to change his/her/their major; participants discussed how these policies directly impede students' ability to make choices about their academic careers. Participants also shared how well-intentioned APPs may impede development of self-determination skills by "solving problems for students," and not explicitly teaching them how to problem solve independently. Describing a program targeted at building community, one participant expressed "(the program) orientates you to an institution so you get a sense of belonging. Helpful, helpful, helpful. But because we're providing you a packaged sense of belonging, you're not utilizing your skills for self-determination to find your way, right?" Student Codes of Conduct were another policy discussed that may confirm what is expected of students but may not address the reason for behavioral expectations, thus limiting what students can learn from them. Discussants indicated the APP Tool not only emphasized programs that promote or hinder self-determination but additionally promoted thought about APPs that can be revised to include a focus on such skills.

APP TOOL USES

Focus group participants discussed ways that they could use the APP Tool with the themes of implications and fostering collaboration discussed subsequently.

IMPLICATIONS

Participants expressed they could use the APP Tool to not only help themselves think about self-determination, but also to assist students, their parents, and other higher education professionals. They discussed working collaboratively with students to fill in the "challenge" section, which could lead students to articulate self-determination concepts. Next, they indicated the APP Tool could be utilized as a roadmap to match students with programs that foster such skills. In this way, the APP Tool may lead students to think concretely about skill development. One participant said, "We address an issue without ever addressing the skill that's lacking— [this tool] could provide the opportunity to find out what the lacked skill is and if the student wants help to develop that skill." Several other participants added the APP Tool may be used in similar conversations with parents to guide them to understand the skills students are developing.

FOSTERING COLLABORATION

The fourth theme addressed how the APP Tool may facilitate collaboration among different campus offices as they collectively work to foster student self-determination.

Discussants noted the APP Tool could be used to provide an overview of the skills students should ideally develop, and departments could collaborate to determine which APPs addressed the same or different skills. One participant proposed:

I can see it being used at different levels … this tool I think can be used more at a higher level thinking overall about everything being offered on campus and then at an individual office level could use the tool to think about. How can we impact these in each of the programs?

Another participant believed the APP Tool could enable a universal process of addressing student decision making and problem-solving needs, stating, "I think if a tool like this were tied in, it would be easy to follow up the steps. What is the problem? What is the office that it should go to? Did the student follow up?" Participants also suggested providing the tool to faculty so they might consider the incorporation of self-determination goals into their courses, and to gather faculty feedback regarding potential student self-determination needs. One participant mentioned collaborating with faculty would "allow you to develop an institutional perspective on how you better build in strategies that help students become more self-sufficient and who are able to advocate for themselves." Overall, participants indicated utilizing the APP Tool institution-wide would enable a focus on self-determination and provide its users with a common language to describe potential self-determination goals for all students.

Participants also saw themselves using the APP Tool collaboratively with students,

especially to inform the "student challenges" section. They discussed collecting this information from students using campus-wide surveys or using the APP Tool to drive conversations with individual students. One participant proposed,

I think this could be a helpful activity to do with the student and say like, 'What do you think the five common challenges are?' … instead of just one person looking at this, maybe you need more like a dynamic activity with the student so that they can share what they're nervous about and we can point them in the right direction rather than us assuming what they don't know or the challenges are.

Whether used by a variety of professionals or students, most participants felt the APP Tool would encourage a pro-active approach to addressing student needs. "It's an early alert platform." one participant expressed. She went on to describe how using the tool had the potential to streamline communication about where students could go to develop specific skills, stating "I think if a tool like this were tied in, it would be easy to follow up the steps. What is the problem? What is the office that it should go to?" Many participants shared the problem of how many students currently "wait until they need services" to seek them out. One participant noted the APP Tool might address this challenge:

It becomes more of a reactive than a proactive approach … well, one, I may not seek out services just because I don't know how to do that or I'm not comfortable, but even if I'm going to, I'm not going to do it until I'm hitting that point.

The group discussed how the APP Tool could help professionals anticipate student needs by highlighting which self-determination skills are not addressed by current programming.

Equipped with this foresight, professionals can develop strategic programs to enhance these skills and connect students with necessary supports before problems occur.

SUGGESTED REVISIONS

Each focus group was also asked potential ways the APP Tool could be improved. Several suggestions emerged for improving the tool, which were (a) making changes to definitions and formatting and (b) providing different versions of the tool for different populations. Several participants communicated concerns about potential users not understanding the self-determination definitions, especially if these concepts were not a common component of their discipline. To alleviate this potential issue, several participants stressed the need to ensure clarity of concepts and possibly provide examples of each (see Appendix A for examples).

Proposed changes to formatting included creating both paper and digital versions of the APP Tool and reconsidering the order of columns. Several participants advised arranging the "student challenges" and "self-determination outcome" columns adjacent to each other to emphasize their connection; this suggestion was promoted in two of the three focus groups, whereas members of the third group did not indicate this was necessary.

Another participant suggested a future iteration of the APP Tool could include descriptors, or "characteristics associated with" each component of self-determination, to make these concepts tangible for students. He shared this potential addition:

[It] would then help students identify 'Oh, this is what I have. This is what I think I have. This is where I may be lacking,' ... If you're going to set it as a goal to improve an area, you can have observable, measurable characteristics to say you've acquired those over time and then you help them see their own growth.

The second category of suggested revision involved producing different versions of the form catered to a variety of users. Versions would incorporate either more or less explanation of the self-determination concepts based on the users' familiarity; additional clarification would be especially relevant to student users, who may not have previously encountered language describing self-determination. A third proposed addition to the APP Tool included adding a column to indicate how APPs are being advertised, which may make it more helpful to students. Participants discussed how professionals must not only create programs to address self- determination, but also must ensure that students are learning about and participating in these opportunities. One participant added, "students might be a little more into self-advocating if they just knew where to go directly." Participants also saw the tool as being useful to all students, not merely those with disabilities.

Finally, while most participants described the tool as useful and could see its future use on their campuses, there were several areas they felt the APP Tool did not address. They mentioned requiring more guidance regarding factors that undermine development of self- determination development, as well as how to achieve student buy-in.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This analysis addressed several research questions involving participants' use of the APP Tool, including how and what aspects of the tool helped them consider self-determination, and how and in what ways they see themselves employing the tool in their future work. Several themes emerged from the interpretive analysis of participants' feedback. First, the APP Tool prompted participants to consider the intended outcomes of APPs at their institution and compare them to what they accomplish. Thus, utilizing the APP Tool led participants to reflect on what self-determination outcomes were being supported by campus programming, as well as what aspects of self-determination were not reflected in their programming.

Second, participants were also prompted to think about the meaning of self-determination, connecting the concept to student developmental needs, and to think strategically about how programs might be adapted or developed to incorporate this focus. Third, in addition to affecting program development, participants stated the APP Tool could be used to make the concept of self-determination explicit to professionals, students, and even parents. Finally, participants also indicated using the tool would foster collaboration, as various campus offices could consider how their APPs do or do not complement each other. As participants considered collaborative use of the tool, suggestions for improving the tool included making it maximally accessible to different audiences.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

   The APP Tool may have a variety of uses and implications as noted by Madaus et al. (2020). Though additional studies should be conducted on the APP Tool, this exploratory study provided promising findings and implications. First, the APP Tool can be used at multiple timepoints throughout the year as a way to track progress and gather ongoing data on APPs. Second, it can be used as an evaluation and assessment tool for institutions. Specifically, the tool can be used by student affairs professionals to identify and evaluate which current programs are most effective in fostering student self- determination. Highlighting the common challenges students faced can guide professionals to determine whether they are being supported properly by the APPs currently in place. To address financial constraints related to program assessment, the tool could be used to determine which APPs are most cost effective based on related self-determination outcomes. Another implication of the APP Tool involved better informing staff on the importance of self-determination and allowing for cross-program collaboration. During professional development, the APP Tool can be featured to teach staff about self-determination and how it relates to the current campus programs. Additionally, as the APP tool involves perceptions of outcomes each APP addresses, not objective assessments of whether the outcomes were achieved, it may be used as part of a comprehensive outcome assessment process that allows for triangulation across different assessment tools or professionals using them. Utilizing the APP Tool can also allow various campus offices, including student affairs and disability resources, to have coordinated planning and enable the creation of targeted support for students. Including user feedback from higher education professionals was beneficial and ensured that future iterations of the tool will be most helpful to those end users.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCHERS

   The information collected from the three focus groups not only provided insights regarding how professionals could use the APP Tool, but also informed its future development. Additional trials in which postsecondary education professionals explore and reflect on the APP Tool may produce further insights. Feedback should also be sought from higher education students to ensure that the tool is meeting their needs. Researchers can continue to explore making revisions to the tool to increase its usability to a wider group of individuals. Beyond direct implications for future iterations of the APP Tool, these findings highlighted the overlap between student affairs and disability resource professionals. Specifically, members from both groups discussed the need to support development of self-determination skills in the students they serve. Given student affairs and disability resource professionals share common goals, future research might examine collaboration between these two groups as a way to reach and support more students. The broader discussion of activities, policies, and programs at institutions of higher education that emerged from this study has implications for school policy by noting the inaccessibility embedded into higher education. Future research could continue to explore barriers to student success at the college or university level to ensure that students from all disadvantaged groups have an opportunity for success in postsecondary education.

LIMITATIONS

Although the study was conducted using rigorous qualitative analysis, some limitations are still present. The focus groups were intentionally conducted by different APP Tool authors; however, using a variety of moderators may have introduced some variability to the focus group procedures and questions. To mitigate procedural differences, a common PowerPoint slideshow was used between moderators during each focus group. Second, participant demographic information beyond type of institution where they were located was not collected, therefore, we could not comment on participants gender, race, ethnicity, age, or other characteristics. Third, this study included a convenience sample, which means participants attending sessions on the topic were offered the opportunity to participate in the focus group. Therefore, given that this was an exploratory study, a more representative sample could not be established at this point in time. Fourth, potential limitations when using focus groups, including the current project, are "the tendency for certain types of socially acceptable opinions to emerge" (Smithson, 2000, p. 116), as well as the possibility of certain participants dominating the conversation and research process. Fifth, the focus groups only included the professionals who would be utilizing this tool, and no student feedback, which should be a focus of future studies, as challenges students faced are the focus of this Tool. For example, the challenges that professionals listed may be different from the challenges experienced by students. Sixth, the data was coded only by two researchers and an additional party was not consulted, which would have provided additional perspectives on the data that the two researchers may not have. Finally, feedback on the APP Tool was provided after participants heard about and examined the tool. They did not have the chance to put the tool into practice, thus limiting some reflection.

CONCLUSION

Self-determination may present a useful framework with which to guide campus programming and foster student-development. The APP Tool was therefore created to support student affairs professionals to connect activities, programs, and policies (APPs) with common self-determination related challenges that college students may face (Madaus et al., 2020). This study contributed to the self-determination and postsecondary education research literature as it gathered and analyzed data regarding the usability of the APP Tool from the perspective of higher education professionals. The findings of this study supported that the APP Tool has the potential to shape campus programming and promote a campus-wide focus on self-determination for all college students including SWD.

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COMPONENTS AND EXPLANATIONS OF SELF-DETERMINATION

Self-Determination Component	Brief Explanation
Choice-making skills	The ability to identify and select a preferred activity or item from several options without coercion.
Decision-making skills	The use of a process to determine a preferred solution based on a list of relevant action alternatives and with consideration of overall risk.
Problem-solving skills	A process of identifying a solution to resolve a quandary in which response alternatives are identified, selected and verified often through self-instruction.
Goal-setting and attainment skills	Developing a plan to accomplish a targeted behavior or outcome (distal or proximal) through self-regulated behaviors and with regard to consequences of actions and contingencies of an environment.
Independence, risk-taking, and safety skills	Recognition of the individual, acting within an environment of consequences mitigated by assurances or boundaries.
Self-observation, Self-awareness, or Self-monitoring skills	Involves the individual observing his or her own behavior toward identifying an inconsistency between what occurs and a target behavior. (A prerequisite to self-regulation.)
Self–evaluation skills	The specific identification of an inconsistency between what occurs and a target behavior.
Self-reinforcement skills	Rewarding oneself for matching an observed behavior to a target behavior.
Self-instruction skills	Vocalized performance guidance by oneself to direct action toward a targeted behavior; Viewed as a critical step in problem solving.
Self-regulation skills	The ability of the individual to carry out the vocalized performance guidance to direct action toward a targeted behavior.
Self-advocacy and leadership skills	An individual's ability to effectively communicate or assert a desired outcome, often related to achieving specific goals.
Positive attributions of efficacy and outcome expectancy skills	Noting that an outcome or problem may be adequately addressed by response alternatives directed by the individual.

The APP Tool		
Common Challenges	Activities, Programs, Policies	SD Outcomes
Self-Determination (SD) Components		
1. Choice-making skills 2. Decision-making skills 3. Problem-solving skills 4. Goal-setting & attainment skills 5. Independence, risk-taking, and safety skills 6. Self-observation, self-awareness or self- monitoring skills	7. Self-evaluation skills 8. Self-reinforcement skills 9. Self-instruction skills 10. Self-regulation skills 11. Self- advocacy & leadership skills 12. Positive attributions of efficacy and outcome expectancy skills	