

## **CATS Submission – Comprehensive Description**

### **Improving Student Self-Determination Skills in the DRS Eligibility Process**

**Submitted April 3, 2020 by Jill A. Nico**

#### **Abstract from the online CATS Submission**

Student applicants to the DRS office are not prepared for their eligibility meeting. Students do not actively participate and struggle to provide thoughtful/applicable answers to questions. Some also express a sense of nervousness as if they are on a job interview, which complicates their ability to fully participate in the process.

In order to fully participate in an eligibility process, students need to use self-determination skills. Students with disabilities need additional training and support in self-determination through the college disability services eligibility process.

The DRS office will implement a training to improve the self-determination skills of student applicants. To measure the effect of the change, students will complete a self-assessment of their preparedness for the eligibility meeting after they complete the training. This training implementation embraces a) the recommendation of AHEAD to deliver a DRS program that encourages student development of independence and self-determination, and b) the learning college philosophy of Estella Mountain Community College.

#### **What is the Need/Assessment?**

Our need is to improve the self-determination skills of students who apply with the DRS office by preparing them to fully participate in the interactive eligibility (intake) meeting.

#### **Describe the necessity for this change.**

Students with disabilities seeking accommodations for the first time complete an online application in DRS Connect. Once sufficient documentation is collected, the student is scheduled for an eligibility meeting with the DRS advisor. At the meeting the advisor explains the purpose of the meeting, determines eligibility for accommodations and services, and describes next steps.

The purpose of the meeting is to determine the student's individual functional limitations to access that would qualify the student to receive accommodations or academic adjustments. My experience with students during these meetings is that they are not prepared. Students do not actively participate and struggle to provide thoughtful answers, or even applicable answers. Some also express a sense of nervousness as if they are on a job interview, which complicates their ability to fully participate in the process.

In order to fully participate in an eligibility process, students need to use self-determination skills such as explaining the impact of their situation on their own learning, making supported decisions to overcome barriers, and knowing when and how to seek help. It is well documented that students with disabilities fall behind students without disabilities in self-determination skills. Consequently, students with disabilities need additional training and support through the disability services eligibility process, particularly during the transition from high school to college.

The Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) has published Program Standards and Performance Indicators for DRS offices. Section 5.1 recommends that DRS offices deliver a program that encourages student development of independence and self-determination. During the past four years, the DRS office has included four questions in the DRS Connect application that could be considered an inquiry strategy that encourages student development in preparation for the eligibility meeting. The four required questions are:

- 1) What is your primary disability? (Drop down menu of choices, with an option to type in any secondary disabilities),
- 2) What accommodations have you received in the past? (blank field for typing)
- 3) What accommodations would you like to request that were not listed in 2)? (blank field for typing)
- 4) What questions do you have for the disability office? (blank field for typing)

Although these questions provide a framework to express accommodation needs, they do little to prepare the student for the eligibility meeting. They do not help the student connect the accommodation request with a need for access. In addition, applicants often give short answers or answers with no context such as “None” or “I don’t know.”

**Describe what will be (or was) implemented to affect change:**

The DRS office will implement a training to improve the self-determination skills of students who apply for services with the DRS office to prepare them to fully participate with confidence in the interactive eligibility (intake) meeting. Students will complete the training after the application is completed and before the eligibility meeting occurs. To measure the effect of the change, students will complete a self-assessment of their preparedness for the eligibility meeting after they complete the training.

Before beginning the training, the DRS office needs to collect objective baseline data. The same self-assessment will first be administered to student applicants who will not receive the training.

The following is the timeline to close the loop on this CATS assessment.

Baseline data (no change): May 1, 2020 to April 30, 2021

Data during training implementation: May 1, 2021 to April 30, 2022.

During the baseline data collection phase, the training format and content will be carefully developed with input from research and stakeholders. The self-assessment will be developed in April 2020 and be completed in time to begin use on May 1.

This training implementation not only embraces the recommendation of AHEAD to deliver a DRS program that encourages student development of independence and self-determination, but also embraces the learning college philosophy of Estella Mountain Community College:

“We put learning first by engaging learners in the process as full partners, assuming primary responsibility for their own learning.”

**Interpret, compare and describe the results of the change:** Data still to be collected.

**After analyzing the information, what are the next steps?** Data still to be collected.

**Division/Department:**

[Student Affairs](#)

**Other Collaborators:** Pamela Grady

**Completed Full Cycle:** No