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# Mattering and marginality: students with disabilities at Rowan University

Andrew Blazie

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**MATTERING AND MARGINALITY: STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES  
AT ROWAN UNIVERSITY**

by  
Andrew M. Blazie

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services, Administration, and Higher Education  
College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirement

For the degree of

Master of Arts in Higher Education Administration

at

Rowan University

June 17, 2013

Thesis Chair: Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D.

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## **Dedication**

*This thesis is dedicated to my mother.*

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to recognize my mother, Barbara Kelly, who for the last 11 years has battled her way back from a massive stroke, and taught me to never give up no matter what obstacles I may face in life. I also thank her for all of her love, support, and understanding during my time away from her in pursuing my degree.

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## **Abstract**

Andrew M. Blazie  
MATTERING AND MARGINALITY: STUDENTS WITH  
DISABILITIES AT ROWAN UNIVERSITY  
2012/13  
Burton R. Sisco, Ed.D.  
Master of Arts in Higher Education Administration

The goal of this study was to determine if students with documented disabilities at Rowan University felt as if they mattered to the university. The subjects in this study consisted of 161 students with a documented disability during the Spring 2013 semester. Data were collected using a modified version of the *Mattering Scales for Adult Students in Higher Education*, which consisted of 45 Likert scale statements meant to gain insight into students with disabilities perceptions toward mattering in five subscales. Data analysis reported that participants generally felt they mattered in each of the five subscales. However, the lowest mean scores were found in the Administrative Subscale and the highest scores were found in the interaction with Peers Subscale. An analysis of significant correlations discovered different levels of mattering between students with invisible disabilities and students with visible disabilities, transfer students into the university, and students who received an Individual Education Plan (IEP) during his or her K-12 school years.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

The number of students with disabilities in higher education has increased dramatically in the past few decades. However providing services, accommodations, and campus wide initiatives has lagged behind and may create a feeling of non-inclusion or mattering for a student with a documented disability. The population of students with disabilities can possess physical, learning, and psychological disabilities and are traditional college aged students, veterans returning from war, and adult learners. The student population in this classification can have difficulties in transitioning into campus life and may begin to feel less important than other students on campus.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

There has been very little literature or studies focusing on higher education students with disabilities and their feelings of mattering on campus. Students with disabilities when enrolling into college are in transition. The transition process can be difficult for students with disabilities because they must become self-advocates for their needs on campus and in the classroom, as well as attempt to fit in as a student in campus life. Also it is a time when students can begin to feel as marginalized or they do not matter to others on campus (Hadley, 2011; Meade, 2006; Schlossberg, 1989).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to find if students with disabilities in higher education feel as if they matter and possess a feeling of inclusion in all aspects of college life. The study also examined if factors such as type of disability, participation in activities on campus, and interactions with administration, faculty, and students influence the mattering and marginality of students with a disability.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study investigated reasons students with disabilities may feel their concerns, needs, and feelings do not matter to others in higher education settings. The findings may help administrators implement more awareness and sensitivity programs for faculty, staff members, and students on campus. The findings may also assist instructors to become knowledgeable concerning the accommodations some students with disabilities need for success in the classroom.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

The study is limited to the students who have registered and have a documented disability with the Academic Success Center and Disability Resource Services at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. Returned surveys were the only ones used in the study. It is assumed that all student responses to the survey have been attending the university long enough to develop an opinion if they feel as if they matter to other students, faculty, and administration at the university. It is also assumed that a student with a disability who actively participates in various campus activities will feel as though

they matter more in college life than students with a disability who do not actively participate.

The survey is limited by the sample size and the inclusion of only students with a documented disability. Since Rowan University students with a disability are not required to disclose his or her disability to the university, the study was unable to contact all students on campus who possess a disability. Another limitation in the study was the collection of surveys. A convenience sample was used by distributing surveys to students with documented disabilities who participated in the Sure to Pass Academic Coaching program during a six week period, therefore limiting the results to only students attending the coaching program during this timeframe. A simple random sample was also used in the study by distributing the survey through email, therefore limiting the study to only students who read and responded to the email.

Another limitation is the potential for researcher bias. Prior to and during the study, I worked directly with college students with disabilities in various capacities. In addition, a member of my immediate family possesses a physical disability. These factors may influence my feelings toward students with a disability.

### **Operational Definitions**

1. Adult student with a disability: Current enrolled Rowan University students who have a documented disability with the Disability Resources Center and are 25 years of age or older.
2. Ego-extension: “feeling that other people will be proud of our accomplishments or saddened by our failures” (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 9).

3. Invisible disability: Current enrolled Rowan University student who possesses a non-physical disability, such as a psychological or learning disability.
4. Marginality: “one who is living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples, never quite willing to break, even if permitted to do so, with past and traditions, and not quite accepted, because of prejudice, in the new society in which the individual seeks to find a place” (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 7).
5. Mattering: “the feeling that other’s depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension exercises a powerful influence on our actions” (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 165).
6. Student with Disabilities: “those with learning disabilities, permanent health conditions, mental health conditions, as well as those with visual, auditory, and mobility disabilities” (Meade, 2006, p. 136).
7. Traditional aged students with a disability: Current enrolled Rowan University students who have a documented disability with the Disability Resources Center and are between the ages of 18-24.
8. Veteran student with a disability: Current enrolled Rowan University students who served in the United States military and have a documented disability with the Disability Resources Center.
9. Visible disability: Current enrolled Rowan University student who possesses a physical disability, such as mobility or sensory disability.

## **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following questions:

1. Do Rowan students with a documented disability feel as if they matter in regard to: administration, advising, peers, multiple roles, and faculty?
2. Does age, gender, racial/ethnic background, and other demographic information factor significantly into the five subscale mattering levels of students with disabilities on campus?
3. Are there significant differences in the perceptions of mattering at Rowan University between veteran and non-veteran students?
4. Are there significant differences in the perceptions of mattering between students with invisible disabilities and students with visible disabilities at Rowan University?

## **Overview of the Study**

Chapter II is the literature review focusing on the different types of students with disabilities and various life situations a student may be involved in. The review includes research associated with reasons why students with disabilities may feel as though they are marginally connected to the campus and their needs do not matter.

Chapter III describes the methodology and procedures use in the study. This section includes the demographic background of the population and sample, the data collection instrument, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

Chapter IV presents the findings of the study. The section re-examines the research questions and summarizes the data using statistical analysis of the student's responses to the questionnaire.

Chapter V summarizes, discusses, draws conclusions, and suggests further recommendations to the major findings of the study.



## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Mattering and Marginality**

According to Schlossberg (1989) there are various factors that help individuals identify themselves in society. Classifications such as gender, age, ethnicity, race, social status, sexual orientation, religious beliefs are amongst the most common. However these identifications also divide us as a society. The notion of division on college campuses is important for identifying the level of mattering and marginality in students with a disability. Mattering is defined as, “the feeling that other’s depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension exercises a powerful influence on our actions” (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 165). Possessing the feeling of mattering causes an individual to feel as though they are important to others (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1989).

According to Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) the idea of mattering can be traced to Harry Stack Sullivan who used the term “significant others” in the 1940s and 1950s. The term demonstrated how some people matter to us very much while others matter very little, if at all, and can be gauged on a certain level of significance in our lives. “The conviction that one matters to another person is linked to the feeling that: (a) one is an object of his attention; (b) that one is important to him; and (c) that he is dependent on us” (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 163).

Mattering acts directly with an individual's personal belief. If an individual feels he/she matter to others, and this belief can be correct or incorrect, it can act as a motivator. This self perception can greatly influence an individual's decision to attend an institution that is closer to home. If the individual feels others are dependent or he/she is dependent on others, he/she may feel the need to be closer to home and family or friends. Levels of mattering can also determine more serious issues such as suicide or depression as individuals may feel less likely to act on extreme measures if they feel as if they matter and are needed by others close to them (Schlossberg, 1989).

Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) state four main aspects associated with mattering in their research—attention, importance, ego-extension, and dependence. Attention is the most basic form of mattering and “is the feeling that one commands the interest and notice of another person” (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 164). Having the attention of others is perhaps the most essential aspect individuals can feel, and to remain unnoticed by others can be amongst the most isolating feeling human beings can deal with in their lives. People can possess these feelings when they are in transition by attending a new school or placed in a new setting (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1989).

Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) state importance is the feeling that individuals are important to other people and are worthy of their concern either positive or negative. “Whether the adolescent goes on to college or becomes hooked on drugs may deeply concern his parents, whereas they would have no corresponding feelings regarding the fate of the boy or girl down the street” (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 164).

Schlossberg (1989) describes ego-extension as “the feeling that other people will be proud of our accomplishments or saddened by our failures” (p. 8). These feelings reinforce the notion that others care about us, and share the same feelings an individual feels when accomplishing a success and a failure (Schlossberg, 1989). “Although knowing that our failures are critical to another can be a burden, it also reconfirms that we matter to someone” (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 8).

According to Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) dependence can serve as a source of motivation in the area of mattering representing “a compelling social obligation and a powerful source of social integration: we are bonded to society not only by virtue of our dependence on others but by their dependence on us” (p. 165). The feeling that others depend on us for support and that we are dependent on others can represent a vital source of self motivation and higher mattering levels especially in college aged students (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1989). “A college sophomore, deeply depressed and possibly suicidal, was unable to complete a course of study or prepare for a career but got out of bed each day to be at play rehearsals because ‘they need me’” (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 8). The feeling of being needed served as enough motivation and feeling of mattering to save the student’s life (Schlossberg, 1989).

According to Schlossberg (1989) marginality is associated with the idea of individuals transitioning from one setting or part of life into new locations or situations. Individuals may no longer feel as if they are in the center or important in their new situation, and have a feeling of being on the fringe or margins of their new surroundings.

Marginality is defined as one who is living and sharing intimately in the cultural

life and traditions of two distinct peoples, never quite willing to break, even if permitted to do so, with past and traditions, and not quite accepted, because of prejudice, in the new society in which the individual seeks to find a place (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 7).

According to Schlossberg (1989) times of transition is when feelings of marginalizing and mattering can occur most in people and create a feeling of isolation and vulnerability. Rituals symbolize a time of transition for individuals, however many activities occur without formalities. The feeling of marginality during transition can be temporary or become a permanent condition. Therefore, determining the length of the feeling of marginality can become a serious issue. “Clearly this is a complex, almost overwhelming subject, which could leave student affairs staff and counselors perplexed about what, if anything, to do” (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 8). This particular time becomes a difficult adjustment for some, especially for individuals or groups of individuals who may have feelings of exclusion prior to the time of transition (Schlossberg, 1989).

### **Traditional Aged Students with Disabilities in Higher Education**

Traditional aged students with disabilities are in transition from a passive and dependant role, common during their K-12 schooling, to a proactive role in higher education. In elementary, middle, and high school, students with disabilities receive ample amounts of support from parents, teachers, counselors, school psychologists, and administrators who provide support and specialized instruction through the use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). In addition to IEPs, students with disabilities in grades K-12 are protected by the *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973* and the

*Disabilities in Education Act of 2004 (IDEA)* (Hadley, 2011; Meade, 2006; Walpole & Chaskes, 2011). “The IDEA and Section 504 focuses on children needing special educational services, guaranteeing special services with funded entitlements at no cost to parents” (Walpole & Chaskes, 2011, p. 4).

In higher education students with disabilities must follow different guidelines. The students are only protected by the *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)* and the *Americans with Disabilities Act Amended of 2008 (ADAA)*. Based on these acts students with disabilities are required to transition into a role of self-advocacy and independence. However this may become a difficult transition for most students who are accustomed to receiving support from multiple facets (Hadley, 2011; Meade, 2006; Walpole & Chaskes, 2011).

Students are expected to immediately contact the Office of Students Disabilities at his or her institution and identify themselves as a student with a disability. They are also required to provide documentation to the institution verifying their disability and contact each of their instructors to notify them of their disability and the accommodations they need for the classroom (Hadley, 2011). “The student, not the parent or counselor, needs to take the initiative in the process of admissions and documentation. Students should be able to represent themselves and describe their disabilities and the accommodations they need” (Meade, 2006, p. 151). Students with disabilities who are unable to adapt to becoming self reliant during this transitioning time may not know how they will succeed at an institution or how they will fit in with other students on campuses. It is also possible that students with disabilities may decide not to disclosure the nature of their

disability or receive accommodations in order to try and fit in amongst his or her classmates (Hadley, 2011; Walpole & Chaskes, 2011).

According to Meade (2006), student services administrators and staff workers can assist in this transition by promoting self-advocacy with a balance of supporting services. The staff support should understand that students with disabilities need to be treated as individuals not treated differently according to their disability. It is also important for the students to possess a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose. “Many students with disabilities reported that having a disability made it more difficult to meet people and to make friends” (Meade, 2006, p. 152).

### **Veterans with Disabilities in Higher Education**

“Many campuses have seen a dramatic increase in the registration of veteran students returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and the numbers are expected to increase as military personnel transition to civilian life” (Church, 2009, p. 43). The number of veteran students in higher education will also increase due to the creation of the *Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008*. The initiative is an extension of the original GI Bill and is estimated to assist two million veterans attend postsecondary institutions (Madaus, 2011; Madaus, Miller II, & Vance, 2009; Shackelford, 2009). However, of the two million veterans expected to attend college, some will return with physical disabilities and limitations such as with a loss of hearing, vision, and limbs but “as many as 25 percent of these students will have hidden disabilities such as traumatic brain injury, posttraumatic stress disorder, and emotional disabilities” (Madaus, 2011, p. 12).

Veterans possess different experiences and perceptions of what a disability is or how to express their specific needs to college administration and faculty than traditional aged students. Unlike a majority of traditional aged students, most of the disabilities associated with veterans occurred after they completed their formal education and there is no documentation of their disability (Madaus, 2011). Veterans need to receive their documentation for claiming a disability at higher education institutions through the United States government. In recent years there have been delays for veterans to receive disability documentation and even when documentation is obtained it is not guaranteed to be accepted by ADA guidelines as reasonable accommodations at an institution. These issues can severely delay the transition process for veterans back into civilian and campus life (Church, 2009; Madaus, 2011; Madaus, Miller II, & Vance, 2009; Shackelford, 2009).

According to Shackelford (2009) the transitioning process from military into civilian life is forcing many veterans to confront their disability for the first time. The individuals are entering into college with issues concerning self-confidence, self-perceptions, and self-disclosure. Many of these concerns are associated with their military experiences. “They had quickly learned that acknowledging, discussing, or reporting a personal problem or vulnerability would most likely prompt a negative reaction from superiors, as well as peers in their unit” (Shackelford, 2009, p. 37).

### **Invisible Disabilities**

According to Meade (2006) invisible disabilities are disabilities that are associated with psychological and learning disabilities. Psychological disabilities include

depression, general anxiety disorder, bipolar, eating disorders, posttraumatic stress, and schizophrenia. Learning disabilities include attention deficit disorder (ADD), and dyslexia. Invisible disabilities comprise “more than 28% of the total disabilities. This percentage increases to 48% when health and visual problems are added into the mix, making this category the largest category of disability type” (Meade, 2006, p. 142).

Students who possess invisible disabilities may experience barriers in receiving accommodations from administration, staff, and faculty. According to Burgstahler and Moore (2009) staff members may overlook the needs for students with invisible disabilities in favor of those with visible disabilities. “Some faculty members and administrators are more willing to accommodate mobility and sensory impairments than ‘invisible’ disabilities such as learning disabilities and psychiatric impairments” (Burgstahler & Moore, 2009, p. 156).

### **Disability Initiatives in Higher Education**

Perhaps one of the major contributors leading to feelings of non-inclusion, mattering, and acceptance of students with disabilities on college campuses derives from lack of experience, awareness, and training for administration, faculty, and staff members (Madaus, 2011; Schlossberg, 1989). According to Strauss and Sales (2010) nationally recognized programs such as the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) serve as advocates and promote disability rights on higher education campuses. Church (2009) mentions services to veterans on college campuses with programs such as Veterans of America and Combat2College. The programs offer social, health, and counseling initiatives that are exclusive to veterans at college, as well as,



increasing the concerns, issues, accessibility needs associated with disabled veterans to the administration, staff, and students on campus.

According to Meade (2006) institutions are implementing universal design strategies to ensure inclusion of all students on campus regardless of limitations. “Universal design focuses on making changes to curriculum design because it helps all students—not just those with a disability. Faculty can employ universal design strategies in their curriculum that will benefit all students” (Meade, 2006, p. 152). The use of the universal design in the classroom and on campus can assist in eliminating barriers for students with a disability and enhance the feeling of inclusion (Burgstahler & Moore, 2009; Meade, 2006).

### **Mattering Scales**

*The Mattering Scales for Adult Learners in Higher Education (MHE)* by Schlossberg, Lassalle, and Golec (1990) was a survey designed and developed to measure the general perception levels of adult students concerning their institution. The (*MHE*) survey is divided into five subscale areas found in higher education: administration, advising, peers, multiple roles, and faculty.

1. The Administration Subscale measures adult students’ perceptions of the extent to which campus policies and procedures are sensitive to adult student concerns.
2. The Advising Subscale measures adult students’ perceptions of the extent to which advisors and other information providers attend to their questions and concerns.

3. The Peers Subscale measures adult student's perceptions of the extent to which they feel they belong on campus and are accepted as peers in the classroom.
4. The Multiple Roles Subscale measure adult students' perceptions of the extent to which the campus acknowledges competing demands on their time.
5. The Faculty Subscale measures adult students' perceptions of the extent to which faculty members accept them in the classroom (Schlossberg et al., 1990, p. 15).

The goal of the Schlossberg et al. (1990) study was not to provide individual student perceptions of mattering on the college campus, but to present valuable information to the institution based on the overall mattering level of students who may or may not feel included to various initiatives, activities, and programs provided at the institution. Based on the information discovered from the study, the institution can determine areas of success and areas where improvements need to be fixed to help student retention rates amongst different groups found on campus (Schlossberg et al., 1990).

According to Tovar et al. (2009) few studies have been conducted on the idea of mattering and a sense of belonging focused on college aged students. The study used the *College Mattering Inventory* with urban community college and university students with diverse backgrounds. The study was expanded on the premise of the Schlossberg et al. (1990) adult learners survey *Mattering Scales for Adult Students in Postsecondary Education* to include undergraduate students.

## **Mattering Studies at Colleges and Universities**

Since the introduction of the *MHE*, studies focusing on specific groups in higher education have been conducted using the instrument. Smith (1999) used the *MHE* to evaluate the mattering levels of college transfer students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The study reported differences in student mattering in the areas of race and age. In the peers subscale, Asian students at the institution felt they mattered significantly less to his or her peers than White students, and younger students rated the administration significantly higher than older students did in the administration subscale.

Kent (2004) used the *MHE* to evaluate the persistence levels of adult students at the University of Northern Colorado. Persistent students scored significantly higher in mattering levels in the advising subscale, interaction with peers subscale, multiple roles subscale, and interaction with faculty subscale. The study concluded adult students who were persistent in attending college felt they mattered more to the university than students who were not persistent.

## **Previous Student Mattering Studies at Rowan University**

In the past few years there have been two Master's Thesis studies on the topic of mattering and marginality at Rowan University with varying focal groups in the studies. D'Angelo (2010) used *The Mattering Scales for Adult Learners in Higher Education (MHE)* by Schlossberg, Lassalle, and Golec (1990) survey to study the perceptions of graduate students on campus. McGuire (2012) used the *College Mattering Inventory* by Tovar, Simon, and Lee (2009) survey to study the mattering perceptions of undergraduate students on campus.

The D'Angelo (2010) study found graduate students felt higher levels of mattering in the subscales involving faculty, administration, peers, and in multiple roles. The study also found that students who attended school full-time possessed higher levels of mattering in multiple roles in mattering than students who attended school part-time. However, the study revealed students had a lower than normative level of mattering when interacting with campus advisors.

The McGuire (2012) study found high levels of mattering in the belief that students felt they genuinely mattered to their peers, faculty, and they do not feel isolated on campus when involved in student activities. However, similar to the D'Angelo (2010) study the students felt they mattered less to the advisors and counselors at Rowan University than to other groups on campus.

### **Summary of the Literature Review**

The number of students with disabilities and veteran students with disabilities attending college is increasing at a swift pace. Colleges and universities need to be aware of this largely understudied population and create programs, initiatives, and ensure reasonable accommodations are being fulfilled to this particular group on campus. The time of transition may be a difficult one for traditional aged students, as well as veteran students returning to college and civilian life after serving in military combat. It is vital for students with disabilities to contribute to their own success at college by becoming self advocates and express their needs to the faculty, administration, staff members, and fellow students on campus.

During the time of transition students with disabilities may feel excluded from participating in different activities on campus and in the classroom due to the nature of their disability. Faculty members may view students with physical disabilities differently than students with invisible disabilities. Therefore the lack of support from the administration, faculty, and staff members on campus may influence the mattering levels of students with disabilities on college and university campuses. The study of mattering levels of the Rowan University students with a documented disability may reveal areas the university excels and areas of weaknesses amongst the various departments on campus.

## Chapter III

### Methodology

#### Context of the Study

This study was conducted at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey during the Spring 2013 semester. All students eligible to participate in the study possessed a documented disability and this was obtained through the Academic Success Center and Disability Resources Services. The Academic Success Center and Disability Resources Services assists individuals of Rowan University by offering services for students with a disability, services for veteran students, testing accommodations, basic math skills, and tutorial services for students enrolled at Rowan University.

The Disability Resources Center serves a population size of 648 students for the 2012-2013 Fiscal Year and one director (J. Woodruff, personal communication, November 27, 2012). To become classified as a student with a disability the student must prove to have a documented disability. A documented disability is filed in accordance Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* and the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990* (“Academic Success Center- Disability Resources,” 2012). There are 360 male students and 288 female students enrolled through the Academic Success Center as possessing a disability. The population is 19% Freshman, 20% Sophomore, 23% Junior, 29% Senior, 4% Graduate, and 5% Non-Matriculated (Banner, December 17, 2012).

## **Population and Subject Sampling of the Study**

The target population of this study was the students with a documented disability who were enrolled at Rowan University during the spring semester 2013. The available population was the students with a documented disability who attend Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey. A hybrid of convenience sample and simple random sample was used to collect data for the study. A convenience sample was used by collecting data from students who utilized the services of the Academic Success Center and Disability Resources, specifically those who participated in the Sure to Pass Academic Success Coaching program from February 19, 2013 to April 3, 2013. A simple random sample of 402 undergraduate and graduate students who registered a documented disability through the Academic Success Center and Disability Resources at Rowan University were used in the sample.

## **Data Collection Instrument**

A questionnaire was used to collect data concerning students with documented disabilities attitudes toward mattering at Rowan University. The instrument given to the students (Appendix A) is based on a two-part questionnaire that was used in a previous study concerning mattering. The instrument was provided to me by Dr. Burton Sisco and was based on the design and implementation by Schlossberg, Lassalle, and Golec (1990) entitled *The Mattering Scales for Adult Learners in Higher Education (MHE)*.

According to Schlossberg et al. (1990) the *MHE* is reliable and valid. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients for reliability for the five subscales were:  $\alpha = .850$

for administration,  $\alpha = .820$  for advising,  $\alpha = .860$  for peers,  $\alpha = .770$  for multiple roles, and  $\alpha = .820$  for faculty.

The questionnaire used in this study was a blended model using a Likert scale and general demographic questions. The instrument implemented a majority of mattering related questions that was used in the original Schlossberg et al. (1990) questionnaire. A modification was made from the original instrument that changed the use of “adult student” to “student with disability.” A change was also made from the original instrument when comparing “adult student” and “traditional student” to “student with a disability” and “student without a disability.” The change was made in questions 1, 4, 16, 21, 22, 31, 35, 38, and 39.

The questionnaire contained 10 questions based on demographics and 45 Likert scale items based on experiences in the classroom, administration, faculty, advisors, and other students on campus. The 10 demographics questions ask for the individual’s gender, age, race or ethnicity, academic level at Rowan University, veterans status, participation in a disabilities support program, and nature of disability. The 45 Likert scale items are designed to measure the mattering levels of the students in five specific areas: Administration, Advising, Peers, Multiple Roles, and Faculty. Individuals are asked to respond with agreeing or disagreeing to various questions based in the previous five areas. The responses to the questions were placed into five subscales created by Schlossberg et al. (1990) to measure the level of mattering each individual possess in the specified areas. High scores in the field may suggest fair and flexible accommodation



levels for students with disabilities on campus, positive experiences in the classroom, and a feeling of comfort towards the faculty and peers.

A pilot field survey for readability and validity was conducted with the assistance of five former co-workers from the Salem Community College- Salem County One Stop Career Center. The participants found no significant errors, and confirmed the instrument was understandable, clear, and readable. The field survey took all participants less than 10 minutes to complete.

Cronbach's alpha was used to test the internal consistency for reliability of the modified *MHE*. The five subscales results were:  $\alpha = .718$  for administration,  $\alpha = .809$  for advising,  $\alpha = .875$  for peers,  $\alpha = .803$  for multiple roles, and  $\alpha = .842$  for faculty. A comparison of Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the original *MHE* and the modified *MHE* are very similar indicating the instrument is internally consistent and reliable.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Before any data were collected, an Institutional Research Board application was submitted on November 28, 2012 and approved on December 12, 2012 (Appendix B). All identities of the volunteer participants used in the study were assured their responses would remain anonymous. No permission to gather data was needed, except for the permission from the Director of the Academic Success Center and Disability Resources, since the study focused on adult college students with a documented disability.

Enrollment data information was gathered through the assistance of the Director of the Academic Success Center and Disability Resources, for the academic school year 2012-2013.

The paper version of the survey was given to students with a documented disability who utilized the Academic Success Center and Disability Resources, primarily through the Sure to Pass Academic Success Coaching Program, from February 19, 2013 to April 3, 2013. The paper surveys with cover letter (Appendix C) were dispersed by me and fellow Academic Coaches involved in the Sure to Pass Academic Success Coaching program, and were only given to students who had a documented disability at the university. Students were also contacted by a letter (Appendix C), via email to participate in the Mattering Survey through Survey Monkey. To increase response rates, an incentive giveaway of twenty \$10 iTunes gift cards was offered to all students participating in the survey to students who provided their email address for the drawing. Online surveys were sent on February 19, 2013 and four reminder emails were sent through the rest of February until March 15, 2013, when the electronic version of the survey was closed.

The electronic and paper version of the survey on March 15th yielded an unsatisfactory rate of 35%. Additional surveys were encouraged to be passed out by staff members at the Academic Success Center, especially the Academic Coaches who had direct contact with students eligible for participation. Twenty-one additional surveys were collected to bring the response rate to a more satisfactory level of 40%.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed to determine if students with disabilities suffer from feelings of not mattering is valid. The independent variables in the study include gender, race/ethnicity, education level, age, and nature of disability. The information for these

variables was gathered in part one of the questionnaire. The dependent variables in the study include the student's perceptions of mattering to the administration, faculty, advisor and staff members, and other students on campus and was gathered in part two of the questionnaire. The results of the survey were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software to compare the independent and dependent variables.

The data results were used to answer the four research questions posed in the study. Research question 1 (RQ1) used descriptive data results of percentages, frequency distribution, means, and standard deviation. Research question 2 (RQ2) used several bivariate correlations to test for significant correlations between the demographic information and the statements from the five subscales in the survey. Research question 3 (RQ3) used the independent-samples *t* tests and Mann-Whitney test to search for significant differences in the perceptions of mattering at Rowan University between veteran and non-veteran students with documented disabilities. Research question 4 (RQ4) used the independent-samples *t* test to search for significant differences in the perceptions of mattering between students with an invisible disability compared to students with a visible disability.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

#### **Profile of the Sample**

The subjects in this study were students with a documented disability enrolled through the Academic Success Center and Disability Resources at Rowan University during the spring 2013 semester. The survey instrument was sent by email to a randomly selected sample of 402 students on February 19, 2013. The sample size was determined using a sampling calculator of 95% confidence level at +/-3% convenience level from the initial population of 648 students with a documented disability at Rowan University. Paper copies were also dispersed to students with a documented disability within the Academic Success Center and Disability Resources beginning on February 19, 2013. On March 15, 2013 the electronic version of the survey ended and combined with the paper surveys at the time yielded a response rate of 35%. After March 15<sup>th</sup> paper versions of the instrument were administered throughout the rest of the month at the Academic Success Center and an additional 21 surveys were obtained. This brought the total number of responses to 161 out of a target population of 402. The final response rate of the study was 40%.

Table 4.1 illustrates the demographics of the participants in the study. Of the 161 subject surveyed, there were 94 (58.4%) females and 67 (41.6%) males. The majority of the participants were between 18 and 24 years old (79.4%) followed by 30 to 39 years old

(8.1%), 25 to 29 years old (7.5%), 40 to 49 years old (5%), and no reports over 49 years old. A majority of participants in the study were White (77%) followed by African American/ Black (8.1%), Hispanic/Latino (6.2%), Asian/ Pacific Islander and other (3.1%), and Multicultural (2.5%). The participants were 12.4% Freshmen, 12.4% Sophomores, 28% Juniors, 37.3% Seniors, 6.8% Graduate Students, and 5% other. Forty-six percent of the participants received an IEP in grades K-12, 39.7% did not, and 14.3% were unsure. A majority of the participants were transfer students (56.2%), and lived off campus (52.5%). Over 95% of the participants were non-veteran and 4.4% of the participants with a documented disability were veterans. Seventy-three percent of the participants in the survey did not participate in the Sure to Pass Academic Coaching program, and 27% did participate. Eighty-six percent of the participants have an invisible disability and 14% have a visible disability.

Table 4.1

*Participant Demographics (N=161)*

| Variable                | <i>f</i> | %    |
|-------------------------|----------|------|
| <b>Gender</b>           |          |      |
| Male                    | 67       | 41.6 |
| Female                  | 94       | 58.4 |
| Total                   | 161      | 100  |
| <b>Age</b>              |          |      |
| 18-24                   | 127      | 79.4 |
| 25-29                   | 12       | 7.5  |
| 30-39                   | 13       | 8.1  |
| 40-49                   | 8        | 5    |
| Total                   | 160      | 100  |
| <b>Race/Ethnicity</b>   |          |      |
| African American/Black  | 13       | 8.1  |
| Asian/ Pacific Islander | 5        | 3.1  |
| Hispanic/ Latino        | 10       | 6.2  |
| Multicultural           | 4        | 2.5  |
| White                   | 124      | 77   |

|       |     |     |
|-------|-----|-----|
| Other | 5   | 3.1 |
| Total | 161 | 100 |

|                |     |      |
|----------------|-----|------|
| Classification |     |      |
| Freshman       | 20  | 12.4 |
| Sophomore      | 20  | 12.4 |
| Junior         | 45  | 28   |
| Senior         | 60  | 37.3 |
| Graduate       | 11  | 6.8  |
| Other          | 5   | 3.1  |
| Total          | 161 | 100  |

|             |     |      |
|-------------|-----|------|
| IEP in K-12 |     |      |
| Yes         | 74  | 46   |
| No          | 64  | 39.7 |
| Unsure      | 23  | 14.3 |
| Total       | 161 | 100  |

|                  |     |      |
|------------------|-----|------|
| Transfer Student |     |      |
| Yes              | 70  | 43.8 |
| No               | 90  | 56.2 |
| Total            | 160 | 100  |

|                |     |      |
|----------------|-----|------|
| Live on Campus |     |      |
| Yes            | 76  | 47.5 |
| No             | 84  | 52.5 |
| Total          | 160 | 100  |

|              |     |      |
|--------------|-----|------|
| U.S. Veteran |     |      |
| Yes          | 7   | 4.4  |
| No           | 152 | 95.6 |
| Total        | 159 | 100  |

|  |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|
| Participate in Academic Coaching Program |     |     |
| Yes                                      | 43  | 27  |
| No                                       | 116 | 73  |
| Total                                    | 159 | 100 |

|                      |     |     |
|----------------------|-----|-----|
| Nature of Disability |     |     |
| Invisible            | 117 | 86  |
| Visible              | 19  | 14  |
| Total                | 136 | 100 |

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## Analysis of the Data

Research Question 1: Do Rowan students with a documented disability feel as if they matter in regard to: administration, advising, peers, multiple roles, and faculty?

The Administration Subscale measures the perceptions of students with documented disabilities in relation to the current Rowan University policies and procedures. The items in this section focus on activity fees, campus activities, and student newspaper articles that are important to students with a disability (Schlossberg et al., 1990).

Table 4.2 illustrates students with a documented disability at Rowan University perceptions of mattering in regards to the Administrative Subscale of the *MHE*. The maximum score for the subscale was 55 and the minimum was 11. When adjusted for reverse scored items, the mean score for this subscale was 33.92 or mean average of 3.08 out of 5. A majority of students with a documented disability reported the administration makes efforts to accommodate students with a disability (58.1%), and the administration seems to consider students with disabilities priorities as important as students without disabilities priorities (56.9%). There were not any items in the Administration Subscale that reported 50% or more perceptions of low mattering for students with disabilities.

Table 4.2

### *Administration Subscale*

| Statement  | Strongly Agree |     | Agree    |      | Neutral  |      | Disagree |     | Strongly Disagree |     |
|--|----------------|-----|----------|------|----------|------|----------|-----|-------------------|-----|
|  | <i>f</i>       | %   | <i>f</i> | %    | <i>f</i> | %    | <i>f</i> | %   | <i>f</i>          | %   |
| The administration makes efforts to accommodate students with disabilities.<br><i>n</i> =137, <i>SD</i> =.808, <i>M</i> =3.96,<br>Missing=24 | 33             | 4.1 | 74       | 54.0 | 23       | 16.8 | 6        | 4.4 | 1                 | 0.7 |

|   |    |      |    |      |    |      |    |      |    |     |
|---|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|-----|
| Campus rules and regulations seem to have been made for traditional-age students. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =139, <i>SD</i> =.865, <i>M</i> =3.60, Missing=22  | 20 | 4.4  | 59 | 42.5 | 45 | 32.4 | 15 | 10.8 | 0  | 0.0 |
| The administration seems to consider students with disabilities priorities as important as students without disabilities priorities.<br><i>n</i> =151, <i>SD</i> =1.036, <i>M</i> =3.57, Missing=10 | 28 | 18.5 | 58 | 38.4 | 43 | 28.5 | 16 | 10.6 | 6  | 4.0 |
| The school newspaper doesn't discuss students with disabilities issues. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =138, <i>SD</i> =.94, <i>M</i> =3.19, Missing=23   | 16 | 11.6 | 24 | 17.4 | 72 | 52.2 | 22 | 15.9 | 4  | 2.9 |
| It takes too long to register or correct registration problems. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =140, <i>SD</i> =1.027, <i>M</i> =3.10, Missing=21   | 13 | 9.3  | 38 | 27.1 | 43 | 30.7 | 42 | 30.0 | 4  | 2.9 |
| The administration sets things up to be easy for them, not the students. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =140, <i>SD</i> =1.089, <i>M</i> =3.09, Missing=21  | 15 | 10.7 | 34 | 24.3 | 49 | 35.0 | 32 | 22.9 | 10 | 7.1 |
| The faculty and administrators are sensitive to my other responsibilities.<br><i>n</i> =150, <i>SD</i> =1.021, <i>M</i> =3.07, Missing=11   | 11 | 7.3  | 40 | 26.7 | 57 | 38.0 | 32 | 21.3 | 10 | 6.7 |
| I feel my activities fees are spent in a way that is meaningful to me.<br><i>n</i> =138, <i>SD</i> =1.033, <i>M</i> =2.92, Missing=23   | 6  | 4.4  | 37 | 26.8 | 48 | 34.8 | 34 | 24.6 | 13 | 9.4 |
| The university does not commit enough resources to students with disabilities. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =140, <i>SD</i> =1.146, <i>M</i> =2.90, Missing=21  | 15 | 10.7 | 27 | 19.3 | 40 | 28.6 | 45 | 32.1 | 13 | 9.3 |



|   |   |     |    |      |    |      |    |      |    |      |
|---|---|-----|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|
| The university offers alternatives to the traditional semester-length course (like weekends).<br><i>n</i> =138, <i>SD</i> =.881, <i>M</i> =2.80, Missing=23 | 3 | 2.2 | 21 | 15.2 | 71 | 51.5 | 31 | 22.5 | 12 | 8.7  |
| The university's policy of transfer credits penalizes students with disabilities. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =150, <i>SD</i> =.96, <i>M</i> =2.52, Missing=11 | 2 | 1.3 | 15 | 10.0 | 71 | 47.3 | 33 | 22.0 | 29 | 19.3 |

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<sup>a</sup>Item reverse scored

The Advising Subscale measures the perceptions of students with disabilities in relation to receiving information based on their questions and concerns on campus. The items in this section focus on students with a disability's perception of the advisor's interest in them (Schlossberg et al., 1990).

Table 4.3 illustrates students with a documented disability at Rowan University perceptions of mattering in regards to the Advising Subscale of the *MHE*. The maximum score for the subscale was 40 and the minimum was eight. When adjusted for reverse scored items, the mean score for this subscale was 27.90 or mean average of 3.49 out of 5. A majority of Rowan students with a documented disability reported high levels of mattering in regards to always receiving help from an administrative member on campus when they had a question or problem (67.9%), and the administrative staff is helpful in answering their questions (63.1%). Also, the study reported that 60.9% of the students report the administrative rules and regulations are clear to them. There were not any items in the Advising Subscale that reported 50% or more perceptions of low mattering for students with disabilities.

Table 4.3

*Advising Subscale*

| Statement  | Strongly Agree |      | Agree    |      | Neutral  |      | Disagree |      | Strongly Disagree |      |
|--|----------------|------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|-------------------|------|
|  | <i>f</i>       | %    | <i>f</i> | %    | <i>f</i> | %    | <i>f</i> | %    | <i>f</i>          | %    |
| There has always been someone on campus that could help me when I had a question or problem.<br><i>n</i> =143, <i>SD</i> =1.048, <i>M</i> =3.66, Missing=18        | 27             | 18.9 | 70       | 49.0 | 23       | 16.1 | 17       | 11.9 | 6                 | 4.2  |
| Administrative staff is helpful in answering my questions.<br><i>n</i> =141, <i>SD</i> =.776, <i>M</i> =3.65, Missing=20   | 14             | 9.9  | 75       | 53.2 | 40       | 28.4 | 12       | 8.5  | 0                 | 0.0  |
| The administrative rules and regulations are clear to me.<br><i>n</i> =151, <i>SD</i> =1.042, <i>M</i> =3.58, Missing=10   | 26             | 17.2 | 66       | 43.7 | 36       | 23.8 | 16       | 10.6 | 7                 | 4.6  |
| Classes are offered at times that are good to me.<br><i>n</i> =140, <i>SD</i> =.97, <i>M</i> =3.53, Missing=21   | 13             | 9.3  | 77       | 55.0 | 27       | 19.3 | 17       | 12.1 | 6                 | 4.3  |
| If my advisor didn't know the answer to my questions, I'm sure he or she would seek out the answers.<br><i>n</i> =143, <i>SD</i> =1.04, <i>M</i> =3.46, Missing=18 | 21             | 14.7 | 58       | 40.6 | 34       | 23.8 | 26       | 18.2 | 4                 | 2.8  |
| My advisor has office hours at times that I am on campus.<br><i>n</i> =140, <i>SD</i> =1.094, <i>M</i> =3.43, Missing=21   | 18             | 12.9 | 63       | 45.0 | 29       | 20.7 | 21       | 15.0 | 9                 | 6.4  |
| There has always been an advisor available to talk to me if I need to ask a question.<br><i>n</i> =141, <i>SD</i> =1.078, <i>M</i> =3.37, Missing=20               | 16             | 11.4 | 60       | 42.6 | 34       | 24.1 | 22       | 15.6 | 9                 | 6.4  |
| My advisor doesn't seem to remember things we have discussed before. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =151, <i>SD</i> =1.171, <i>M</i> =2.78, Missing=10                   | 11             | 7.3  | 33       | 21.8 | 43       | 28.5 | 40       | 26.5 | 24                | 15.9 |

<sup>a</sup> Item reverse scored

The Peers Subscale measures the perceptions of students with disabilities in relation to belonging on campus and feeling accepted by their peers in the classroom. The items in this section focus on the comfort levels and sense of camaraderie with other students that students with a disability perceive on campus (Schlossberg et al., 1990).

Table 4.4 illustrates students with a documented disability at Rowan University perceptions of mattering in regards to the Peers Subscale of the *MHE*. The maximum score for the subscale was 55 and the minimum was 11. When adjusted for reverse scored items, the mean score for this subscale was 38.65 or mean average of 3.51 out of 5. A majority of students with a disability reported high levels of mattering in regards to having a good relationship with classmates who do not have a disability (80.5%), getting opportunities to get to know fellow classmates (67.9%), and receiving help from classmates if they needed it (67.4%). There were not any items in the Peers Subscale that reported 50% or more perceptions of low mattering for students with disabilities.

Table 4.4

*Peers Subscale*

| Statement   | Strongly Agree |      | Agree    |      | Neutral  |      | Disagree |     | Strongly Disagree |     |
|---|----------------|------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|-----|-------------------|-----|
|   | <i>f</i>       | %    | <i>f</i> | %    | <i>f</i> | %    | <i>f</i> | %   | <i>f</i>          | %   |
| I have a good relationship with classmates who do not have a disability.<br><i>n</i> =139, <i>SD</i> =.864, <i>M</i> =4.09,<br>Missing=22 | 48             | 34.5 | 64       | 46.0 | 19       | 13.7 | 7        | 5.0 | 1                 | 0.7 |
| I have had adequate opportunities to get to know fellow students.<br><i>n</i> =140, <i>SD</i> =.937, <i>M</i> =3.72,<br>Missing=21        | 25             | 17.9 | 70       | 50.0 | 29       | 20.7 | 13       | 9.3 | 3                 | 2.1 |
| My classmates would help me with a problem if I needed it.<br><i>n</i> =138, <i>SD</i> =.816, <i>M</i> =3.70,<br>Missing=23               | 16             | 11.6 | 77       | 55.8 | 34       | 24.6 | 9        | 6.5 | 2                 | 1.5 |

|  |    |      |    |      |    |      |    |      |    |      |
|--|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|
| As a student with a disability I feel welcome on campus.<br><i>n</i> =139, <i>SD</i> =.87, <i>M</i> =3.68, Missing=22  | 22 | 15.8 | 65 | 46.8 | 37 | 26.6 | 15 | 10.8 | 0  | 0.0  |
| I feel like I fit in with my classes.<br><i>n</i> =143, <i>SD</i> =1.064, <i>M</i> =3.59, Missing=18   | 27 | 18.9 | 62 | 43.4 | 26 | 8.2  | 24 | 16.8 | 4  | 2.8  |
| I feel my classmates react positively to my experience and knowledge.<br><i>n</i> =142, <i>SD</i> =.837, <i>M</i> =3.57, Missing=19                          | 13 | 9.2  | 71 | 50.0 | 45 | 31.7 | 10 | 7.0  | 3  | 2.1  |
| I get support from my classmates when I need it.<br><i>n</i> =150, <i>SD</i> =.973, <i>M</i> =3.55, Missing=11   | 20 | 13.3 | 70 | 46.7 | 38 | 25.3 | 17 | 11.3 | 5  | 3.3  |
| The classroom atmosphere encourages me to speak out in class.<br><i>n</i> =141, <i>SD</i> =.946, <i>M</i> =3.52, Missing=20                                  | 16 | 11.4 | 67 | 47.5 | 35 | 24.8 | 20 | 14.2 | 3  | 2.1  |
| My disability sometimes gets in the way of my interactions with fellow students. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =139, <i>SD</i> =1.268, <i>M</i> =3.36, Missing=22 | 26 | 18.7 | 52 | 37.4 | 22 | 15.8 | 24 | 17.3 | 15 | 10.8 |
| I sometimes feel alone and isolated at the university. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =151, <i>SD</i> =1.275, <i>M</i> =3.01, Missing=10                           | 18 | 11.9 | 48 | 31.8 | 24 | 15.9 | 40 | 26.5 | 21 | 13.9 |
| Fellow students don't seem to listen to me when I share my life experiences. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =141, <i>SD</i> =.917, <i>M</i> =2.40, Missing=20      | 4  | 2.8  | 11 | 7.8  | 41 | 29.1 | 66 | 46.8 | 19 | 13.9 |

<sup>a</sup> Items reverse scored

The Multiple Roles Subscale measures students with disabilities' perceptions of the extent Rowan University acknowledges the competing demands on their time. The

items in this section focus on the flexibility of rules and policies to allow the students with disabilities to meet other responsibilities (Schlossberg et al., 1990).

Table 4.5 illustrates students with a documented disability at Rowan University perceptions of mattering in regards to the Multiple Roles Subscale of the *MHE*. The maximum score for the subscale was 35 and the minimum was seven. When adjusted for reverse scored items, the mean score for this subscale was 21.86 or mean average of 3.12 out of 5. A slight majority of students with disabilities reported they are given enough time to complete required administrative tasks (50.4%). There were not any items in the Multiple Roles Subscale that reported 50% or more perceptions of low mattering for students with disabilities.

Table 4.5

*Multiple Roles Subscale*

| Statement   | Strongly Agree |     | Agree    |      | Neutral  |      | Disagree |      | Strongly Disagree |      |
|---|----------------|-----|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|-------------------|------|
|   | <i>f</i>       | %   | <i>f</i> | %    | <i>f</i> | %    | <i>f</i> | %    | <i>f</i>          | %    |
| I don't have time to complete the administrative tasks this institution requires. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =143, <i>SD</i> =1.036, <i>M</i> =2.65, Missing=18                     | 4              | 2.8 | 31       | 21.7 | 36       | 25.2 | 55       | 38.5 | 17                | 11.9 |
| I will have a hard time finishing my degree because of time limits on completing course requirements. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =150, <i>SD</i> =1.161, <i>M</i> =2.77, Missing=11 | 11             | 7.3 | 33       | 22.0 | 37       | 24.7 | 48       | 32.0 | 21                | 14.0 |
| It's hard for me to go back to the school environment. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =143, <i>SD</i> =1.153, <i>M</i> =2.83, Missing=18  | 11             | 7.7 | 32       | 22.4 | 40       | 28.0 | 41       | 28.7 | 19                | 13.3 |

|   |    |      |    |      |    |      |    |      |    |      |
|---|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|
| Unless I have another student with a disability in my class, no one really understands how hard it is to be here. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =138, <i>SD</i> =1.195, <i>M</i> =2.94, Missing=23 | 17 | 12.3 | 27 | 19.6 | 41 | 29.7 | 37 | 26.8 | 16 | 11.6 |
| The administrative offices are not open at times when I need them. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =143, <i>SD</i> =.956, <i>M</i> =2.96, Missing=18   | 7  | 4.9  | 35 | 24.5 | 52 | 36.4 | 43 | 30.0 | 6  | 4.2  |
| The desks aren't made for students with a disability. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =139, <i>SD</i> =1.018, <i>M</i> =2.98, Missing=22   | 14 | 10.1 | 17 | 12.2 | 71 | 51.1 | 26 | 18.7 | 11 | 7.9  |
| Departmental rules sometimes make my goals difficult or impossible. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =139, <i>SD</i> =.996, <i>M</i> =3.01, Missing=22  | 13 | 9.4  | 23 | 16.6 | 62 | 44.6 | 34 | 24.5 | 7  | 5.0  |

<sup>a</sup> Item reverse scored

The Faculty Subscale measures the perceptions of students with disabilities in relation to feeling accepted by faculty members in the classroom. The items in this section focus on comfort levels in the classroom for students with a documented disability and if are treated equally in comparison to students without a disability (Schlossberg et al., 1990).

Table 4.6 illustrates students with a documented disability at Rowan University perceptions of mattering in regards to the Faculty Subscale of the *MHE*. The maximum score for the subscale was 40 and the minimum was eight. When adjusted for reverse scored items, the mean score for this subscale was 27.84 or mean average of 3.48 out of 5. A majority of the students reported their experience-based comments are accepted by the faculty (69.5%), feeling comfortable with the jokes told by their professors (69.3%),

and feeling equally recognized in the classroom compared to students without disabilities (59.1%). There were not any items in the Faculty Subscale that reported 50% or more perceptions of low mattering for students with disabilities.

Table 4.6

*Faculty Subscale*

| Statement  | Strongly Agree |     | Agree    |      | Neutral  |      | Disagree |      | Strongly Disagree |      |
|--|----------------|-----|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|-------------------|------|
|  | <i>f</i>       | %   | <i>f</i> | %    | <i>f</i> | %    | <i>f</i> | %    | <i>f</i>          | %    |
| Some of the jokes my professors tell make me feel uncomfortable. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =140, <i>SD</i> =1.01, <i>M</i> =2.24, Missing=21              | 3              | 2.1 | 17       | 12.1 | 23       | 6.4  | 65       | 46.4 | 32                | 22.9 |
| My professors seem to recognize the students without disabilities but not me. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =142, <i>SD</i> =.998, <i>M</i> =2.35, Missing=19 | 2              | 1.4 | 18       | 12.7 | 38       | 26.8 | 54       | 38.0 | 30                | 21.1 |
| My professors sometimes ignore my comments or questions. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =140, <i>SD</i> =1.089, <i>M</i> =2.49, Missing=21                     | 5              | 3.6 | 27       | 19.3 | 22       | 15.7 | 63       | 45.0 | 23                | 16.4 |
| My questions seem to put faculty members on the defensive. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =150, <i>SD</i> =1.046, <i>M</i> =2.55, Missing=11                   | 5              | 3.3 | 27       | 18.0 | 34       | 22.7 | 63       | 42.0 | 21                | 14.0 |
| I sometimes feel my professors want me to hurry up and finish speaking. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =139, <i>SD</i> =1.124, <i>M</i> =2.68, Missing=22      | 9              | 6.5 | 26       | 18.7 | 34       | 24.5 | 51       | 36.7 | 19                | 13.7 |
| Sometimes I feel left out in the classroom. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =141, <i>SD</i> =1.12, <i>M</i> =2.70, Missing=20                                   | 6              | 4.3 | 37       | 26.2 | 25       | 17.7 | 55       | 39.0 | 18                | 12.8 |
| My professors interpret assertiveness as a challenge to their authority. <sup>a</sup><br><i>n</i> =149, <i>SD</i> =1.039, <i>M</i> =2.88, Missing=22     | 10             | 6.7 | 31       | 20.8 | 50       | 33.6 | 47       | 31.5 | 11                | 7.4  |

|   |    |      |    |      |    |      |    |     |   |     |
|---|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|-----|---|-----|
| My experience-based comments<br>are accepted by my professors.<br>$n=141, SD=.745, M=3.73,$<br>Missing=20 | 15 | 10.6 | 83 | 58.9 | 33 | 23.4 | 10 | 7.1 | 0 | 0.0 |
|---|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|-----|---|-----|

<sup>a</sup> Item reverse scored

Table 4.7 illustrates the descriptive statistics for the normative sample and research sample. The research data from this study are primarily in line with the normative data for other 4-year institutions. However, students with documented disabilities at Rowan University scored lower in all mattering subscales when compared to the combined mean from the normative study.

Table 4.7

*Descriptive Statistics for Normative and Research Samples by Subscales*

| Subscale       | Group    | Mean  | SD   | N               |
|----------------|----------|-------|------|-----------------|
| Administration | 2-year   | 39.25 | 3.13 | 7 institutions  |
|                | 4-year   | 33.04 | 4.13 | 16 institutions |
|                | Combined | 34.93 | 4.78 | 23 institutions |
|                | Rowan    | 33.92 | 0.98 | 161 students    |
| Advising       | 2-year   | 30.22 | 1.95 | 7 institutions  |
|                | 4-year   | 27.97 | 2.58 | 16 institutions |
|                | Combined | 29.63 | 2.53 | 23 institutions |
|                | Rowan    | 27.90 | 1.03 | 161 students    |
| Peers          | 2-year   | 41.36 | 0.89 | 7 institutions  |
|                | 4-year   | 37.84 | 3.30 | 16 institutions |
|                | Combined | 39.02 | 3.20 | 23 institutions |
|                | Rowan    | 38.65 | 0.98 | 161 students    |
| Multiple Roles | 2-year   | 22.66 | 0.95 | 7 institutions  |
|                | 4-year   | 21.90 | 2.08 | 16 institutions |
|                | Combined | 22.13 | 1.82 | 23 institutions |
|                | Rowan    | 21.86 | 1.07 | 161 students    |
| Faculty        | 2-year   | 29.65 | 0.95 | 7 institutions  |
|                | 4-year   | 27.84 | 2.12 | 16 institutions |
|                | Combined | 28.39 | 2.08 | 23 institutions |
|                | Rowan    | 27.84 | 1.02 | 161 students    |



Research Question 2: Does age, gender, racial/ethnic background, and other demographic information factor significantly into the five subscale mattering levels of students with disabilities on campus?

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relationship between the demographic information, including age, gender, racial/ethnic background, and other demographic information into the five subscale mattering scales including administration, advising, peers, multiple roles, and faculty.

An analysis of the data showed correlations were found in all five subscales of the *MHE*. Correlations were found in nine of the 10 demographic areas including age, gender, race/ethnicity, students with an IEP in grades K-12, transfer students, residence status, current year at Rowan, participation in the Sure to Pass Academic Coaching program, and nature of disability. Though correlations were found significant at the .01 and .05 (2-tailed), all correlations were weak with none above  $r = +/- .28$ .

Significant correlations with age are illustrated in Table 4.8. Two significant correlations with age were reported.

Table 4.8

*Significant Correlations with Age*

| Subscale | Items   | <i>r</i> coefficient | <i>p</i> level |
|----------|---|----------------------|----------------|
| Multiple | I don't have time to complete the administrative tasks this institution requires. | -.176*               | .036           |
| Peers    | I feel like I fit in with my classes.   | -.205*               | .014           |

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Significant correlations with gender are illustrated in Table 4.9. Two significant correlations with gender were reported.

Table 4.9

*Significant Correlations with Gender*

| Subscale | Items  | <i>r</i> coefficient | <i>p</i> level |
|----------|--|----------------------|----------------|
| Faculty  | Some of the jokes my professors tell make me feel uncomfortable. | -.177*               | .036           |
| Peers    | I sometimes feel alone and isolated at the university.           | -.167*               | .040           |

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

A significant correlation with race and ethnicity is illustrated in Table 4.10. One significant correlation with age was reported.

Table 4.10

*Significant Correlation with Race/Ethnicity*

| Subscale | Items  | <i>r</i> coefficient | <i>p</i> level |
|----------|--|----------------------|----------------|
| Peers    | I have a good relationship with classmates who do not have a disability. | .175*                | .040           |

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Significant correlations with students with an IEP in grades K-12 are illustrated in Table 4.11. Three significant correlations with students who possessed an IEP in grades K-12 were reported.

Table 4.11

*Significant Correlations with Students with an IEP in K-12*

| Subscale       | Items  | <i>r</i> coefficient | <i>p</i> level |
|----------------|--|----------------------|----------------|
| Administration | The university does not commit enough resources to students with disabilities. | -.209*               | .013           |

|                |   |        |      |
|----------------|---|--------|------|
| Multiple Roles | Departmental rules sometimes make my goals difficult or impossible.               | -.178* | .036 |
|                | I don't have time to complete the administrative tasks this institution requires. | -.176* | .036 |

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Significant correlations with transfer students are illustrated in Table 4.12. Three significant correlations with transfer students were reported.

Table 4.12

*Significant Correlations with Transfer Students*

| Subscale       | Items   | <i>r</i> coefficient | <i>p</i> level |
|----------------|---|----------------------|----------------|
| Administration | The university offers alternatives to the traditional semester-length course (like weekends). | -.203*               | .017           |
|                | It takes too long to register or correct registration problems.                               | .167*                | .050           |
| Multiple Roles | The administrative offices are not open at times when I need them.                            | .212*                | .011           |

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Significant correlations with residence status are illustrated in Table 4.13. Two significant correlations with residence status were reported.

Table 4.13

*Significant Correlations with Residence Status*

| Subscale       | Items  | <i>r</i> coefficient | <i>p</i> level |
|----------------|--|----------------------|----------------|
| Administration | I feel my activities fees are spent in a way that is meaningful to me. | -.222**              | .009           |

|  |   |       |      |
|--|---|-------|------|
|  | The school newspaper doesn't discuss students with disabilities issues. | .168* | .050 |
|--|---|-------|------|

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Significant correlations with the student's current year at Rowan University are illustrated in Table 4.14. Two significant correlations with the student's current year were reported.

Table 4.14

*Significant Correlations with Student's Current Year at Rowan University*

| Subscale       | Items   | r coefficient | p level |
|----------------|---|---------------|---------|
| Administration | The school newspaper doesn't discuss students with disabilities issues. | .201*         | .018    |
| Faculty        | I sometimes feel my professors want me to hurry up and finish speaking. | .188*         | .027    |

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

A significant correlation with students who participate in the Sure to Pass Academic Coaching Program is illustrated in Table 4.15. One significant correlation was reported.

Table 4.15

*Significant Correlation with Students Participating in Academic Coaching*

| Subscale       | Items   | r coefficient | p level |
|----------------|---|---------------|---------|
| Administration | The school newspaper doesn't discuss students with disabilities issues. | -.258**       | .002    |

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Significant correlations with the nature of the student’s disability are illustrated in Table 4.16. Eight significant correlations with the nature of the student’s disability were reported. The largest number of correlations were reported in this demographic group.

Table 4.16

*Significant Correlations with Nature of Disability*

| Subscale       | Items  | <i>r</i> coefficient | <i>p</i> level |
|----------------|--|----------------------|----------------|
| Administration | The school newspaper doesn’t discuss students with disabilities issues.                      | .270**               | .003           |
|                | The university does not commit enough resources to students with disabilities.               | .232**               | .009           |
| Advising       | There has always been someone on campus that could help me when I had a question or problem. | -.232**              | .009           |
| Peers          | I have had adequate opportunities to get to know fellow students.                            | -.274**              | .002           |
|                | I get support from my classmates when I need it.   | -.251**              | .004           |
|                | I have a good relationship with classmates who do not have a disability.                     | -.231**              | .010           |
| Multiple Roles | The desks aren’t made for students with a disability.  | .240**               | .007           |
| Faculty        | My questions seem to put faculty members on the defensive.                                   | .205*                | .019           |

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Research Question 3: Are there significant differences in the perceptions of mattering at Rowan University between veteran and non-veteran students?

An independent-samples *t* test and Mann-Whitney test were used to search for significant differences in the perceptions of mattering at Rowan University between veteran and non-veteran students. The tests found no significant differences between the two groups of students and the 45 Likert scaled items. All scores reported were greater than *sig*=.076.

Research Question 4: Are there significant difference in the perceptions of mattering between students with invisible disabilities and students with visible disabilities at Rowan University?

An independent-samples *t* test was used to search for significant mean differences in the perceptions of mattering in the five subscales between students with invisible disabilities and students with visible disabilities. Table 4.17 illustrates the mean scores and standard deviations between the two groups.

Table 4.17

*Descriptive Statistics for Students with Invisible vs. Visible Disabilities*

| Subscale       | Group                                | Total Mean | SD   |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|------------|------|
| Administration | Students with Invisible Disabilities | 35.32      | 0.96 |
|                | Students with Visible Disabilities   | 32.86      | 1.12 |
| Advising       | Students with Invisible Disabilities | 28.11      | 0.98 |
|                | Students with Visible Disabilities   | 25.79      | 1.25 |
| Peers          | Students with Invisible Disabilities | 39.13      | 0.93 |
|                | Students with Visible Disabilities   | 34.54      | 1.13 |
| Multiple Roles | Students with Invisible Disabilities | 21.74      | 1.02 |
|                | Students with Visible Disabilities   | 20.93      | 1.27 |
| Faculty        | Students with Invisible Disabilities | 27.84      | 0.98 |
|                | Students with Visible Disabilities   | 25.79      | 1.22 |

An independent-samples *t* test was also used to search for significant differences in the perceptions of mattering at Rowan University between students with invisible disabilities and students with visible or physical disabilities. Table 4.18 illustrates seven significant differences found in all five subscales. The administration and peers subscales each reported two significant differences.

Table 4.18

*Significant Correlations between Invisible and Visible Disabilities*

| Subscale       | Items   | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>sig</i> |
|----------------|---|----------|-----------|------------|
| Administration | The school newspaper doesn't discuss students with disabilities issues. <sup>a</sup><br>Invisible: <i>n</i> =105, <i>M</i> = 3.08, <i>SD</i> =.885<br>Visible: <i>n</i> =18, <i>M</i> =3.78, <i>SD</i> =.943          | -3.080   | 121       | .003**     |
|                | The university does not commit enough resources to students with disabilities. <sup>a</sup><br>Invisible: <i>n</i> =106, <i>M</i> = 2.84, <i>SD</i> =1.097<br>Visible: <i>n</i> =19, <i>M</i> =3.58, <i>SD</i> =1.261 | -2.644   | 123       | .014*      |
| Advising       | There has always been someone on campus that could help me when I had a question or problem.<br>Invisible: <i>n</i> =107, <i>M</i> = 3.73, <i>SD</i> =.947<br>Visible: <i>n</i> =19, <i>M</i> =3.05, <i>SD</i> =1.393 | 2.652    | 124       | .044*      |
| Peers          | I have had adequate opportunities to get to know fellow students.<br>Invisible: <i>n</i> =105, <i>M</i> = 3.79, <i>SD</i> =.817<br>Visible: <i>n</i> =19, <i>M</i> =3.11, <i>SD</i> =1.150                            | 3.145    | 122       | .012*      |
|                | I get support from my classmates when I need it.<br>Invisible: <i>n</i> =111, <i>M</i> = 3.63, <i>SD</i> =.883<br>Visible: <i>n</i> =19, <i>M</i> =2.95, <i>SD</i> =1.224   | 2.932    | 128       | .021*      |
| Multiple Roles | The desks aren't made for students with a disability. <sup>a</sup><br>Invisible: <i>n</i> =105, <i>M</i> = 2.86, <i>SD</i> =.924<br>Visible: <i>n</i> =19, <i>M</i> =3.53, <i>SD</i> =1.264                           | -2.734   | 122       | .020*      |

|         |   |        |     |       |
|---------|---|--------|-----|-------|
| Faculty | My questions seem to put faculty members on the defensive. <sup>a</sup> |        |     |       |
|         | Invisible: $n=105$ , $M= 2.86$ , $SD=.924$                              | -2.369 | 128 | .038* |
|         | Visible: $n=19$ , $M=3.53$ , $SD=1.264$                                 |        |     |       |

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<sup>a</sup> Item is reverse scored

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)



## **Chapter V**

### **Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

#### **Summary of the Study**

This study is based on the conceptual framework of mattering first developed by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) and later established by Nancy Schlossberg (1989) in her transitory study of adult learners in higher education. According to Schlossberg (1989), times of transition is when feelings of marginalizing and mattering can occur most in people and create a feeling of isolation and vulnerability. In this study, Schlossberg's *Mattering Scales for Adult Students in Higher Education (MHE)* was utilized and distributed to a representative population of students with a documented disability at Rowan University. The data were analyzed to determine the levels of student mattering in five subscales.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to determine if students with a documented disability at Rowan University felt included and if they matter to different facets of the university. The research focused on the student levels of mattering in five subscales: administration, advising, peers, multiple roles, and faculty. The overall perceptions of mattering levels were analyzed and discussed. Correlations were identified and discovered between various demographic information and the five subscales. Differences in types of disability and veteran status were also researched and analyzed.

The findings of this study can be used to inform administration, faculty, and staff members at Rowan University the perception levels of their departments from students with disabilities on campus. The information discovered can be used to create initiatives focused on disability awareness and to create campus and classroom environments to become more inclusive for students with disabilities.

### **Methodology**

The study was designed to investigate the perceptions of mattering among students with a documented disability at Rowan University in the Spring 2013 semester. A randomly selected sample of students with a documented disability was selected from the Disabilities Resources Center roster and invited to participate in the study via email. Four hundred and two students were sent emails and a link to participate in the study.

The instrument used in this study was *The Mattering Scales for Adult Learners in Higher Education* (Schlossberg et al., 1990). The survey instrument includes 10 demographic questions and 45 Likert scale statements to discover the student's perceptions of mattering in five subscales: administration, advising, peers, multiple roles, and faculty.

Before any data were collected, an Institutional Research Board application was submitted on November 28, 2012 and approved on December 12, 2012 (Appendix B). After receiving approval, a pilot field survey was conducted with the assistance of five former co-workers from Salem Community College. The participants in the field survey found no significant errors, and confirmed the instrument was understandable, clear, and readable. The field survey took all participants less than 10 minutes to complete. The

*MHE* was reformatted for online survey instrumentation through Survey Monkey and a paper survey was also utilized (Appendix A). Online surveys were emailed to students on February 19, 2013. Paper surveys were given to students with a documented disability through the Sure to Pass Academic Coaching program beginning on February 19, 2013. The online survey was closed on March 15, 2013. The paper survey continued to be administered to increase participation rates and was closed on April 3, 2013.

### **Data Analysis**

All online survey data were downloaded and transferred from Survey Monkey into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software program. All paper surveys were entered manually into the SPSS program. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and the five subscales were used to answer research question 1 (RQ1). Research question 2 (RQ2) used Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients to test for significant correlations between the demographic information and the statements from the five subscales in the survey. Research question 3 (RQ3) and research question 4 (RQ4) used the independent-samples *t* test to search for significant differences in student perceptions of mattering.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

Research Question 1: Do Rowan students with a documented disability feel as if they matter in regard to: administration, advising, peers, multiple roles, and faculty?

In general, mean scores in all five subscales reported positive feelings of mattering at Rowan University. In comparison to the normative data provided for 4-year institutions, Rowan University students with documented disabilities reported higher

levels of mattering in the Administration and Peers subscales, identical levels of mattering in Faculty subscale, and slightly lower levels of mattering in Advising and Multiple Roles subscales. There were no items from all five subscales that reported 50% or more perceptions of low mattering for students with disabilities. However, all subscales, except for the Peers Subscale, found at least one item where “neutral” was the highest percentage reported.

The highest average mean subscale score was found in the Interaction with Peers Subscale. When adjustments were made for reverse scored items, the average mean subscale score was 3.51 out of 5. Over 80% of the students reported having a good relationship with classmates who do not have a disability. Also, more than 67% of the students reported they have had opportunities to get to know fellow classmates and would receive help from the classmates if needed. It is indicated by these findings that generally students with documented disabilities felt included and as if they matter to their fellow classmates.

The second highest mean subscale score was reported in the Advisor Subscale. When adjustments were made for reverse scored item the average mean subscale score was 3.49 out of 5. The students reported high levels of mattering in regards to receiving help from an administrative member on campus when they had a question or problem and overall the administrative staff is helpful in answering their questions. In addition, a majority of students reported that the administrative rules and regulations are clear to them.

The third highest mean subscale score was reported in the Faculty Subscale. When adjustments were made for reverse scored items the average mean subscale score was 3.48 out of 5. A majority of students with documented disabilities reported high perceptions of mattering with three items in the subscale. Over 69% of the students reported their experience-based comments are accepted by faculty members, and they felt comfortable with the jokes told by their professors. Also, 59.1% felt equally recognized in the classroom to classmates who do not possess a disability. It is indicated by these findings that generally students with disabilities felt as though they matter to his or her professors in the classroom setting.

The fourth highest mean subscale score was reported in the Multiple Roles Subscale. When adjustments were made for reverse scored items the average mean subscale score was 3.12 out of 5. Even though it is not the lowest mean subscale score, it is the only subscale that reported just one statement greater than 50%. A total of 50.4% of the students reported they do have enough time to complete the administrative tasks the institution requires. This lack of clear majority may indicate that some students with disabilities feel the institution does not consider their outside responsibilities and demands enough.

The lowest mean subscale was found in the Administration Subscale. When adjustments were made for reverse scored items the average mean subscale score was 3.08 out of 5. However, a majority of students perceive high levels of mattering in two statements. Over 58% of the students believe the administration makes efforts to accommodate students with a disability, and nearly 57% of the students reported the

administration seems to consider students with disabilities priorities as important as students without disabilities priorities. Despite a generally positive score for mattering, there is room for improvement with the concerns of students with disabilities towards the administration.

Research Question 2: Does age, gender, racial/ethnic background, and other demographic information factor significantly into the five subscale mattering levels of students with disabilities on campus?

There were weak correlations between 9 of the 10 demographics information, only veteran status showed no correlations, and all five subscales that were studied. The nature of the student's disability produced the highest number of significant correlations (eight) and all five subscales were represented. The Peers Subscale was the highest represented subscale with three significant correlations. This indicates the nature of the student's disability is an important factor for administrators, staff members, and faculty to consider when creating future campus wide initiatives, programs, and curriculum designs to increase interactions between students with disabilities and students without disabilities.

Students who received IEPs during grades K-12 produced three significant correlations, two in multiple roles, and one in administration. Also, students who transfer into Rowan University produced three significant correlations, two in administration, and one in multiple roles. This may indicate that students with disabilities who received an IEP or transferred into Rowan University experienced transition issues on campus.

Age, gender, residential status, and student's current year at Rowan University each showed two significant correlations. Age had one correlation in multiple roles and one correlation in peers. Gender had one correlation in faculty and one correlation in peers. Residential status had two correlations in administration. Current year at Rowan University had one correlation in administration and one correlation in faculty. Overall, this may indicate that age, gender, residential status, and student's current year at Rowan University does not factor into a student's perception of mattering on campus.

Racial and ethnic background and participation in the Sure to Pass Academic Coaching program each showed one significant correlation. Racial and ethnic background had one correlation in peers. Participation in the academic coaching program had one correlation in the administration. This may indicate that a student's racial and ethnic background and participation in the Sure to Pass Academic Coaching program does not factor into a student's perception of mattering on campus.

Research Question 3: Are there significant differences in the perceptions of mattering at Rowan University between veteran and non-veteran students?

An independent-samples *t* test and Mann-Whitney test were used to search for significant differences in the perceptions of mattering at Rowan University between veteran and non-veteran students. The tests found no significant correlations or differences between the two groups of students, the five subscales, and the 45 Likert scaled items. This indicates that veteran and non-veteran student background does not factor into a student's perception of mattering at Rowan University.

Research Question 4: Are there significant differences in the perceptions of mattering between students with invisible disabilities and students with visible disabilities at Rowan University?

Overall, students with invisible disabilities and students with visible disabilities feel as if they matter in all five subscales at Rowan University. However, when items are adjusted for reverse scoring, significant differences were found in the means for the five subscales between the two groups. Students with invisible disabilities scored higher in all five subscales compared to students with visible disabilities. This indicates there is room for substantial improvement in all facets of campus and student life for students with visible disabilities. In addition, this finding contradicts the notion made by Burgstahler and Moore (2009) who declared faculty and staff members may overlook the needs for students with invisible disabilities in favor of those with visible disabilities.

Significant differences were discovered when independent-samples *t* tests were performed between students with invisible disabilities and students with visible disabilities. Seven correlations were found in all five subscales. Two correlations were found in administration and peers, and one correlation each in advising, multiple roles, and faculty. Even though the correlations are weak, it indicates there are differences in mattering between students with invisible and students with visible disabilities.

## **Conclusions**

The findings of the study revealed that students with documented disabilities at Rowan University generally have positive feelings towards mattering in all five subscales in the *MHE*. In addition, the findings, when compared to the normative data for adult



learners at other 4-year institutions, reflected similar mean scores of perceptions in mattering in all five subscales.

Students with documented disabilities in this study reported the Peers Subscale as the highest levels of positive mattering. A large majority of students reported having a good relationship with classmates who do not have a disability, having opportunities to get to know fellow classmates, and would receive help from the classmates if needed. The lowest scoring subscales were found in the multiple roles and administrative subscales. However, despite being the lowest scoring subscales, students reported both groups as generally positive perceptions of mattering.

Correlations between demographic information and the statements in survey instrument were found in all five subscales and in all but one of the 10 demographic questions. The nature of the student's disability had the most correlations and clearly indicated that administrators, faculty, and staff members need to be mindful of students with disabilities issues and concerns when creating campus wide initiatives, programs, and curriculum designs.

The survey found there are no significant correlations between veteran and non-veteran students. However, several weak correlations were discovered between students with invisible disabilities and students with visible disabilities. Students with invisible disabilities had higher levels of mattering on campus in all five subscales than students who possess a visible disability. This finding indicates the need for campus wide improvement.

Comparing the results of this mattering study to the results found in other Rowan University mattering studies found some similarities and some differences. The D'Angelo (2010) study utilized the *MHE* survey for graduate students' perceptions of mattering at Rowan University and found even higher perceptions of mattering than this study of students with documented disabilities in all subscales except for advising. Similarly, this study had higher perceptions of mattering in advising when comparing mean scores in the Advising Subscale (3.49) to the mean score of the mattering to counselors and advisors (2.90) in the McGuire (2012) study on residential undergraduate students using the *College Mattering Inventory (CMI)*.

However, compared to the other subscales of the *MHE* and mattering mean scores in the *CMI*, this study found overall lower scores in mattering for students with documented disabilities compared to the mattering perceptions of graduate and undergraduate residential students at Rowan University. These findings reinforce the need for greater campus wide awareness toward students with disabilities.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations for practice are presented:

1. The institution needs to evaluate, develop, and implement campus wide awareness programs to administration, staff members, and faculty to better service students with disabilities on campus.

2. Faculty and administration members need to remain mindful of the special accommodations students with all types of disabilities require to be successful at the institution.
3. Since the Peers Subscale received the highest levels of mattering, the institution must maintain the positive interactions between students with disabilities and students without disabilities inside and outside the classroom.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions for future research are recommended.

1. More research needs to be conducted focusing on mattering levels of students with disabilities using the same, or similar instrument to make stronger correlations between the demographic questions and the *Mattering Scales for Adult Students in Higher Education (MHE)* subscales.
2. The *MHE* should continue to be revised to fit the changing college campus and changing needs of today's college students.
3. Conduct a mixed method study of surveys and one-on-one interviews focusing primarily on veteran students with documented disabilities and students with visible disabilities.

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## **Appendix A**

Instrument: Student Questionnaire

## MATTERING SURVEY

*Participation in this survey is voluntary, and you are not required to answer any of the questions, however your cooperation is greatly appreciated and important to the success of this study. The purpose of the study is to examine students with disabilities and their perceptions of mattering at Rowan University. All participants must be 18 years old or older and all responses will be kept anonymous and confidential and no personal information is being requested. If you have any questions or problems concerning your participation in this study, you may contact Andrew Blazie by phone at (856) 678-3337, or email at blazie19@students.rowan.edu or Dr. Burton Sisco by phone at (856) 256-4500 x. 3717 or email sisco@rowan.edu.*

**Part I. Please place an "X" in the box or fill in the blank.**

1. What is your gender?  Male  Female
2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your race/ethnicity?  African American/Black  American Indian/ Alaskan Native  
 Asian/Pacific Islander  Hispanic/Latino  Multicultural  White  Other
4. What is your current year at Rowan University?  Freshman  Sophomore  Junior  
 Senior  Graduate Student  Other/Unknown
5. Did you have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) at any time in grades K-12?  Yes  No  
 Not Sure
6. Are you a transfer student?  Yes  No
7. Do you live on campus?  Yes  No
8. Are you a veteran?  Yes  No
9. Do you participate in the Sure to Pass Academic Success Coaching Program?  Yes  No
10. What is the nature of your disability? \_\_\_\_\_

**Part II. Answer each question by circling the number that describes your feeling about mattering.**

| Statement   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| 1. The university's policy of transfer credits penalizes students with disabilities.  | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 2. My advisor doesn't seem to remember things we have discussed before.   | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 3. I will have a hard time finishing my degree because of time limits on completing course requirements.                                | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 4. The administration seems to consider students with disabilities priorities as important as students without disabilities priorities. | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 5. I get support from my classmates when I need it.   | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |

## MATTERING SURVEY

| Statement  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| 6. My questions seem to put faculty members on the defensive.  | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 7. The faculty and administrators are sensitive to my other responsibilities.                            | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 8. I sometimes feel alone and isolated at the university.  | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 9. The administrative rules and regulations are clear to me.   | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 10. My professors interpret assertiveness as a challenge to their authority.                             | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 11. The administration sets things up to be easy for them, not the students.                             | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 12. It's hard for me to go back to the school environment.   | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 13. If my advisor didn't know the answer to my questions, I'm sure he or she would seek out the answers. | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 14. The classroom atmosphere encourages me to speak out in class.  | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 15. I feel my classmates react positively to my experience and knowledge.                                | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 16. My professors seem to recognize the students without disabilities but not me.                        | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 17. I don't have time to complete the administrative tasks this institution requires.                    | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| Statement  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 18. There has always been someone on campus that could help me when I had a question or problem.         | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 19. I feel like I fit in with my classes.  | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 20. The administrative offices are not open at times when I need them.                                   | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 21. The administration makes efforts to accommodate students with disabilities.                          | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 22. I have a good relationship with classmates who do not have a disability.                             | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 23. Sometimes I feel left out in the classroom.  | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 24. The university does not commit enough resources to students with disabilities.                       | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |



## MATTERING SURVEY

| Statement   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| 25. There has always been an advisor available to talk to me if I need to ask a question.                             | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 26. My classmates would help me with a problem if I needed it.  | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 27. My experience-based comments are accepted by my professors.   | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 28. It takes too long to register or correct registration problems.   | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 29. Administrative staff is helpful in answering my questions.  | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 30. Fellow students don't seem to listen to me when I share my life experiences.                                      | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 31. Unless I have another student with a disability in my class, no one really understands how hard it is to be here. | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 32. The university offers alternatives to the traditional semester-length course (like weekends).                     | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 33. I have had adequate opportunities to get to know fellow students.   | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 34. Campus rules and regulations seem to have been made for traditional-age students.                                 | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 35. My disability sometimes gets in the way of my interactions with fellow students.                                  | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| Statement   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| 36. Some of the jokes my professors tell make me feel uncomfortable.  | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 37. Classes are offered at times that are good for me.  | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 38. As a student with a disability, I feel welcome on campus.   | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 39. The desks aren't made for students with a disability.   | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 40. I feel my activities fees are spent in a way that is meaningful to me.  | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 41. My advisor has office hours at times that I am on campus.   | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 42. Departmental rules sometimes make my goals difficult or impossible.   | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |

## MATTERING SURVEY

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| Statement   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| 43. The school newspaper doesn't discuss students with disabilities issues. | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 44. My professors sometimes ignore my comments or questions.                | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |
| 45. I sometimes feel my professors want me to hurry up and finish speaking. | 5              | 4     | 3       | 2        | 1                 |

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY!!!

## **Appendix B**

### **Institutional Review Board Approval Letter**



December 12, 2012

Andrew Blazie  
23 New Jersey Ave.  
#2  
Pennsville, NJ 08070

Dear Andrew Blazie:

In accordance with the University's IRB policies and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to inform you that the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has exempted your project, category I.

IRB application number: 2013-111

Project Title: Mattering and Marginality: College Students with Disabilities

If you need to make significant modifications to your study, you must notify the IRB immediately. Please reference the above-cited IRB application number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

If, during your research, you encounter any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, you must report this immediately to Dr. Harriet Hartman ([hartman@rowan.edu](mailto:hartman@rowan.edu) or call 856-256-4500, ext. 3787) or contact Dr. Shreekanth Mandayam, Associate Provost for Research ([shreek@rowan.edu](mailto:shreek@rowan.edu) or call 856-256-5150).

If you have any administrative questions, please contact Karen Heiser ([heiser@rowan.edu](mailto:heiser@rowan.edu) or 856-256-5150).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Harriet Hartman".

Harriet Hartman, Ph.D.  
Chair, Rowan University IRB

c: Burton Sisco, Educational Services, Administration, Higher Education, James Hall

Office of Research  
Bole Hall  
201 Mullica Hill Road  
Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701

856-256-5150  
856-256-4425 fax

## **Appendix C**

### Email/Letter To Participants

Hello Students!

My name is Andrew Blazie and I am currently enrolled in the Higher Education Administration graduate program here at Rowan University. Over the past two semesters I have been interning at Academic Success Center and Disability Resources at Rowan and preparing my thesis, titled "Mattering and Marginality: Students with Disabilities at Rowan University". The thesis is focusing on perceptions of mattering for students with disabilities and veteran students with disabilities on campus. It is my hope the analysis of the data collected through this research will be able to benefit students with disabilities, and increase staff and faculty awareness at Rowan University in the future.

In order to successfully complete my thesis requirement I greatly need your help! The survey should only take about 10 minutes to complete, and all responses will remain anonymous and confidential. The deadline for the survey is March 15, 2013.

To show my appreciation for your participation in the survey **I am offering 20, yes TWENTY, \$10 gift cards for iTunes to be chosen at the end of the survey deadline on Friday, March 15<sup>th</sup>. To be eligible for the gift card write your email address on this sheet.** The winners will be notified by email.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation!

Sincerely,  
Andrew Blazie