Admissions Practices in Inclusive Postsecondary Education

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Abstract

This study examines the eligibility requirements and admissions processes of Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) programs in the United States to explore how these structures influence access to higher education for students with intellectual disability. Drawing on frameworks of Inclusive Postsecondary Education, Disability Studies in Education, and DisCrit, this research examines what admissions criteria are used in a subset of IPSE programs, and how program criteria may reduce or intensify existing barriers to college for students with intellectual disability. Utilizing survey responses from IPSE program directors and analyses of the websites of IPSE programs participating in TPSID Cohorts 2 and 3, the study documents 222 distinct admissions requirements. These findings reveal a range of criteria, including guardianship status, documentation of disability, financial prerequisites, academic thresholds, and behavioral assessments. While some requirements appear routine, others may disproportionately burden students with intellectual disability. Although the study identifies patterns of exclusion, it also highlights variability across programs, suggesting opportunities for reform. Limitations include a relatively small sample size and inconsistent demographic data, which limit conclusions about the impact of admissions practices on student diversity. This research addresses a critical gap in the IPSE literature and provides insights to promote more equitable admissions practices. Recommendations for future research are also included.

Keywords: intellectual disability, inclusive postsecondary education, inclusive higher education, admissions, developmental disability

Introduction

Students with intellectual disability have more opportunities than ever before to attend college, with 359 Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) college and university programs now in the United States. Thanks in part to the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA; PL 110-315), as well as other U.S. legislation that includes transition supports and postsecondary access for students with disabilities (IDEIA; PL 108-446; ADA; PL 110-325), Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) access, funding, technical assistance, and research have grown significantly since its inception (Grigal et al., 2023, 2024). IPSE programs vary significantly based on both the profile of the university or college, such as size, geography, location, course offerings, as well as the characteristics of the program, such as inclusivity, supports, financial options, and residential offerings (Ducett & Myers, 2023; Gill & Myers, 2023; Grigal et al., 2013; Myers & Smith, 2024; Think College, 2022). Most IPSE programs, however, offer an alternative admissions process for students with intellectual disability who are applying to the program.

Previous research has identified several barriers to postsecondary access for students with intellectual disability, including admissions criteria (as will be examined in this paper), pre-program considerations, and programmatic and university issues (e.g., Grigal et al., 2022; Hughson & Uditsky, 2019; Kim & Park, 2023; Lee & Taylor, 2022). Pre-admission barriers to postsecondary access for students with intellectual disability include a lack of collaboration with K-12 school systems and high school transition planning (Lee & Taylor, 2022), lack of awareness of IPSE (Kim & Park, 2023), and limited IPSE program options, particularly in specific regions (such as the Northwestern United States) and international contexts (including most of Europe) (Hughson & Uditsky, 2019; Kim & Park, 2023; Lee & Taylor, 2022; O'Brien et

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al., 2019). Systemic barriers for students with intellectual disability include limited funding (Mock & Love, 2012; Lee & Taylor, 2022; Plotner & Marshall, 2015), access to transportation (Lee & Taylor, 2022), or housing availability (Grigal, et al., 2022; Lee & Taylor, 2022; Yuan et al., 2018). Additionally, families have encountered program barriers such as a lack of individualized or specific supports (Lee & Taylor, 2022) and physical inaccessibility (Rodriguez Herrero et al., 2021). For many, family support has been noted as critical for student access (Rodriguez Herrero et al., 2021).

Research in higher education has illustrated that postsecondary education admissions requirements and processes can be barriers for many students, especially those with marginalized identities (Finger, 2022). A 2012 study by Grigal et al. (2022) found that 25% of responding programs at that time required placement tests for student admission. Other entrance criteria included measurement of students' safety skills, adherence to or agreement with the student code of conduct, and ability to navigate the college campus. Ten years later, Grigal et al. (2022) found additional admission criteria from the 257 programs that self-reported survey data to update a national directory of higher education programs enrolling students with intellectual disability. While almost all programs (over 98%) had a minimum age, 75% also reported a maximum age, a potential barrier for older students who may not have had access to programs like these ten years ago. Twenty-five percent required specific state attendance, 18.7% required specific district or school system attendance, and some programs required vocational rehabilitation or Medicaid eligibility. Some programs reported minimum requirements for reading level or personal independence. Programs also reported requiring employment experience, an unusual requisite for college entrance (Hossler et al., 2019). Adherence to the code of conduct and interest in or motivation to attend college were also noted (Grigal et al., 2022). There is significant variability in admission practices in IPSE across the United States.

This study focuses on only IPSE programs that participated in a model demonstration program called the Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSIDs). TPSID programs are intended to "create or expand high-quality, inclusive model comprehensive transition and postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disability" (Office of Postsecondary Education, 2025). The TPSID designation means that, for five years, these programs received federal funding through the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education. Along with this funding was a requirement to gather and report student and program data to a corresponding National Coordinating Center. Although there are many IPSE programs that have not received TPSID funding, we selected TPSID programs for this study because of their relatively standardized data collection requirements.

While annual reports offer some minimal information regarding the admissions requirements used in these programs (Grigal et al., 2021), a more comprehensive multi-year analysis of admissions requirements used by these IPSE programs has not been conducted. To address this gap, we designed this study to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the eligibility requirements for Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSIDs) in Cohorts 2 and 3 in the United States?
2. What are the admission processes for Cohorts 2 and 3 TPSID programs in the United States?
3. How might eligibility requirements and admissions processes affect the diversity of Cohorts 2 and 3 TPSID programs in the United States?

Theoretical Frameworks

We approached this research utilizing frameworks of Inclusive Postsecondary Education, Disability Studies in Education, and Critical Disability Studies (DisCrit). Inclusive postsecondary education has been in practice in markedly small and marginal spaces beginning as early as the 1970s (Neubert et al., 2001; Westling et al., 1976), but it has only recently begun to be explicitly named as a theoretical framework. Myers and Smith (2024) propose Inclusive Postsecondary Education as a research framework that emphasizes inclusion and the value of cognitive diversity at all levels, with particular focus on higher education for students with intellectual disability. As such, this framework supports research to examine barriers to college for students with intellectual disability, particularly through specialized admissions processes.

We have also considered this research within a Disability Studies in Education (DSE) and DisCrit framework, with the understanding that barriers are constructed by program or university requirements. Disability Studies urges us to examine not only the social construction of disability, but the consequences of these constructions (Linton, 1998). Specific to this study, disability is constructed not as inherent to the individual, but as a product of the meaning assigned by society (e.g., colleges and universities). These institutions take this socially constructed understanding of disability and apply it in shaping admissions cri-

teria, which, through a critical analysis, are revealed to function as barriers that systematically exclude or disadvantage certain individuals. DisCrit pushes this understanding even further to include intersectionality with students' multiple identities, including race, gender, socioeconomics, family status, and more (Annamma et al., 2013, 2018; Crenshaw, 1991). This theoretical framework helps us understand how students with multiple marginalized identities encounter compounded barriers, as their experiences of exclusion are shaped not by a single axis of identity, but by the intersecting effects of race, disability, gender, class, and other forms of systemic oppression. By examining admissions requirements through a DisCrit lens, we can consider specific aspects within IPSE programs that invite some students and exclude others.

Method

Study Design

This study aimed to examine eligibility requirements (RQ1) and admissions processes (RQ2) of IPSE Programs in the United States, and to use that information in concert with student demographics, to understand how eligibility requirements and admission processes may impact access for students from multiply marginalized identities (RQ3). To conduct this research, we utilized website analysis and surveys, which included both quantitative and qualitative aspects. This mixed methods approach, aligned with Creswell and Hirose's (2019) illustration, allowed for the phenomenon of IPSE admissions in the United States to be understood, while also using quantitative data to determine patterns related to IPSE student demographics and admissions at different sites.

Website analysis was used to determine the range of eligibility requirements and admissions processes that students with intellectual disability encounter in their quest for higher education. Surveys were conducted to gather greater insight into the purpose behind those requirements and processes. For example, if an IPSE program used campus tours as part of their admissions process, we wanted to know what the admissions team hoped to learn about the student from that tour. Additionally, with demographic questions in the survey, we aimed to learn who is admitted to programs with campus tours as part of the admissions process. The DSE and DisCrit frameworks informed the decision to utilize the combination of website analysis and surveys because they highlight the importance of contextualizing disability within political and social realms (Linton, 1998), and "considering the legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens" (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 11). By looking at survey results, which included program site demographics, directly with the website analysis, the students and the administrators creating these requirements are not completely disconnected from the actual requirements potential students have to meet.

Website Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was conducted to determine patterns amongst the eligibility requirements and admissions processes of selected IPSE programs throughout the United States (RQ1&2). As the DSE tenets highlight, research within this framework should promote "meaningful access to all aspects of society" while also being contextualized within "political and social" understandings of disability (Connor et al., 2008, p. 448). Although IPSE programs are part of a move toward more meaningful access for people with intellectual disability into higher education, we were especially curious if and how deficit-based social understandings of disability would be replicated within IPSE admissions. To accomplish this, we used methods similar to summative qualitative content analysis (SQCA), which was employed by Sullivan and Ali (2024) in their content analysis of Canadian university kinesiology curricula and websites. This method was ideal for our study because it goes beyond finding patterns within the website texts to "draw on social and cultural trends that reveal larger systems of discourse and their meaning" (Sullivan & Ali, 2024, p. 6).

The TPSID grants have been dispersed every five years since 2010 in the United States to between 22-27 grantees, with the amount depending on fiscal allotment approved by Congress and distributed via a competitive grant process by the Department of Education. This study focuses on IPSE programs at colleges and universities that received TPSID grants during Cohort 2 (funded between 2015-2020) and Cohort 3 (funded between 2020-2025), which consisted of 40 distinct TPSID grantees across both cohorts. Some TPSID grantees funded program implementation at a single college or university campus, and others supported program implementation at multiple college or university campuses. Six of these grantees received TPSID grants during both cohorts: California State University at Fresno, Millersville University, Minot State University, University of Alabama, University of Hawaii at Manoa, and University of South Alabama. Some grantees disperse their funds to multiple distinct program sites. Across the TPSID grantees in Cohorts 2 and 3, there were 99 program sites funded. Accounting for duplicate sites,

there were 88 distinct program sites funded through TPSID Cohorts 2 and 3. We aimed to analyze websites from at least one site from each TPSID grantee. We did not gather data from Rhode Island College and University of Missouri Kansas City, two of the Cohort 2 grantees, because the programs no longer existed at the point of data collection. In some cases, we gathered from more than one site from the same grantee. For example, we looked at the websites from Millersville, Duquesne, and Temple, which were all within the Millersville grantee network of both TPSID cohorts.

Although there is demographic data published by Think College on students who participate in the TPSID programs, these data are not disaggregated by program or site specifically o (Grigal et al., 2021; Grigal et al., 2025). Therefore, there is no current publicly available information about the demographic breakdown of TPSID programs disaggregated by program/site. Even though our study design only had information from a sample of program sites from Cohorts 2 and 3 TPSIDs, we believe these demographics offer an important context.

Cohort 2: Within Cohort 2, there were 25 TPSID grant awardees who implemented IPSE across 58 program sites. These sites spanned 19 states. We collected data from 27 sites within this TPSID cohort, with at least one site from each grantee. According to the Annual Report of the Cohort 2 TPSID Model Demonstration Projects (Year 5, 2019-2020), Year 5 of Cohort 2 had 956 students enrolled across all program sites; 61% of students in this group identified as White, 24% as Black or African American, 13% as Hispanic, 7% as Asian, and 1% as American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. Seventeen percent were dually enrolled through their high school. The National Coordinating Center at Think College, the TPSID grantees federally funded evaluator, reported that 62% of student enrollments were in courses considered inclusive, meaning they were courses available to and attended by students without intellectual disability (Grigal et al., 2021). Approximately 59% of these programs had students who were only enrolled in inclusive courses (Grigal et al., 2021).

Cohort 3: Within Cohort 3, there were 22 TPSID grant awardees implementing IPSE programs at 39 different sites as of the end of Year 5. These sites spanned across 16 states. In total, we collected data from 27 of the program sites within this Cohort, with at least one from each grantee. Of the 557 students in TPSID Cohort 3 in Year 4 (the most recent data available), 13% received college-based transition services through their high school. The racial breakdown of this Cohort is as follows: 60% White, 12% Black or African American, 11% Hispanic or Latino/a/x, 7% Asian, 3% more than one race, 2% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander and American Indian or Alaska Native, and 3% not reported. Over half of these program sites (58%) had students enrolled in inclusive classes only, while the rest had a lower percentage of academic inclusion (Grigal et al., 2025).

Surveys

Through the addition of surveys to this study, we had the opportunity to further engage with not only DSE but also the DisCrit tenet valuing "multidimensional identities" (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 11). The original survey was created to gain a deeper understanding of how demographics of students in a program may be impacted by their admissions (RQ3), and to determine eligibility requirements and admissions processes not visible on the program websites (RQ2&3). The survey questions, as highlighted in Table 1, were greatly informed by the intent to determine preliminary patterns between accepted IPSE student demographics and the eligibility requirements and admissions processes. The survey was designed through mixed methods, with demographic information related to the participant and their IPSE program as the quantitative portion, and qualitative questions related to the eligibility requirements and admissions processes. These qualitative questions were prefaced by Likert-style questions to direct the participant to the correct open-ended question. For example, if a participant responded to the question, "Which of the following are part of your program's admissions process?" with ALWAYS program/campus tour, they were then directed to the question, "What is the purpose of the campus tour and protocol?" Every participant also had an opportunity to respond to the final question, "Describe anything about your admissions process that has not been mentioned in the previous questions."

As Braun et al. (2021) have highlighted in their work on qualitative survey research, there are many benefits to the survey method, including minimized risk and increased accessibility (p. 646), as opposed to other qualitative methods like interviews. The few quantitative aspects of the survey were designed to integrate with the qualitative data through a convergent design (Fetters et al., 2013).

Data Collection

After obtaining IRB approval, we emailed a survey invitation to 32 program directors of the TPSID program Cohort 3 programs. In Cohort 3, there were 39 sites associated with 22 awardees. We gathered emails for the directors from the Think College public

Table 1

IRB Approved Survey Questions

Questions about you:
- What postsecondary program do you work with? (Name of Program, State)
- What is your title?
- What role have you played in the admissions process in this program?

Questions about your program, in general:
- How many students do you currently have in your program?
- How many students do you typically accept each new school year?
- Of your current students, what is the racial and ethnic breakdown? (slide to the correct percentage)
- Of your current students, what is the socioeconomic status breakdown? (slide to the correct percentage)
- Of your current students, what is the gender breakdown? (slide to the correct percentage)

Questions about admissions:
- Does your program have minimum academic skills required for admission?
- What are the academic skills requirements and how are they measured?*
- What type of diploma is required for admittance to your program?
- Does your program require a certain level of verbal communication for admittance?
- What is the verbal communication level required and how is it measured?*
- What other skills does your program require students to have before being admitted and how do you measure them?
- Which of the following are part of your program's admissions process? (Likert from Always to Never): Online Application; Paper Application; In-Person Interview; Virtual Interview; Program/Campus Tour; Student Observation; Test; Other (please specify)
- What does the application typically ask for? (or attach the application in next question)
- Please attach your program application.
- What is the interview protocol? (attach any interview related documents in the next question)*
- Please attach interview materials.*
- What is the purpose of the campus tour and protocol?*
- What is the protocol for student observations?*
- Is there a rubric or set of criteria followed for student observations? (please attach if so)*
- What type of test is required and how is it given?*
- Describe anything about your admissions process that has not been mentioned in the previous questions.

**Questions that were only displayed if an affirmative related answer was given on a previous question.*

directory of IPSE programs (Think College, 2022). Our sampling frame consisted of at least one site from each TPSID awardee, choosing the first listed contact for every awardee. With some of the awardees with multiple sites, the recruitment email was forwarded to other site directors. This action was determined when directors from those programs completed the survey. Surveys were completed by participants during the same timeframe that the program websites were reviewed and analyzed. Therefore, as surveys came in from additional sites, such as the directors within the Pennsylvania consortium, we added those additional sites to our website analysis list.

We offered gift cards to participants for survey completion. After collecting initial responses (10 complete and 3 incomplete surveys), we resent our email to nonrespondents, and added the TPSID program Cohort 2 directors, which added 20 new possible survey participants to the sampling frame. After the second round of survey recruitment, we had 17 completed surveys and 3 partially completed surveys in total.

Concurrently with implementing the surveys, we completed a web search of TPSID program websites from every grantee who was sent the survey recruitment email, to examine eligibility information and admissions procedures through publicly available in-

formation. As mentioned previously, as the surveys came in, we had submissions from multiple sites within the same grantee. We then added the websites of those sites to our analysis. Not all grantees had functional websites, and not all sites included application materials or admission criteria. From Cohort 2, we looked to analyze 30 of the TPSID sites, two of which no longer existed. From Cohort 3, we analyzed 27 websites, 9 of which were also in Cohort 2. Removing duplicates in both cohorts, we analyzed a total of 48 websites. Table 2 shows each TPSID grantee in Cohorts 2 and 3, the number of sites whose websites were analyzed, and the number of surveys received.

Data Analysis

Similarly to Beck and Godley (2023), the two distinct methods of data collection were analyzed recursively to identify patterns of characteristics for IPSE admissions. It was intentional to analyze both the website analysis and survey results together in the same spreadsheet. Each site, 48 in total, was given a reference number in the spreadsheet. These reference numbers were chosen when the first round of surveys came in, using the participant number as the reference number. For example, the site where the first participant to submit the survey works became reference number 1. Two sites had multiple directors submit the survey, but this was not recognized until all codes had been developed, so there were two extra reference numbers initially, which is why there were 50 total reference numbers.

Each row in the spreadsheet contained a different admissions eligibility requirement or process. Researchers inductively coded the data, starting with survey data and then website data. Coding was done by hand with no set codebook. A code was created for every eligibility requirement and admissions process evident in the data, to address RQ1 and RQ2. While analyzing the qualitative survey responses, coding was related to the overall admissions requirement or process being discussed. Sample Analysis A illustrates how we went from the physical data to the codes in the spreadsheet.

Sample Analysis A. Table 3 shows a small subset of the coding spreadsheet, from reference numbers 1 through 4. Site 1 data included both a survey and any information from the site website related to admissions. Both points of data mentioned requiring an IEP as part of the admissions process. Therefore, at the cross-cell between IEP Needed and Site 1, we put the number "1," signifying the reference number. For any site that had multiple data points (i.e., a survey and a website), we coded any requirement or process that was mentioned on either data source. For example, if the website did not mention a verbal speech requirement, but the survey did, we coded that site as requiring speech.

Initial coding revealed 222 codes that were consolidated into 20 thematic headings. For example, the "paperwork" heading was divided into approximately eight different codes, such as guardianship and high school information. Within Table 4, we have highlighted the 20 thematic headings along with a sample of codes within each. Considering all of the codes within each theme, the third column describes which aspect (eligibility requirement or admissions process) that theme is connected to. Many are described as "both" because the code was part of the process that would ultimately be used to determine eligibility. For example, in most programs there is an application portion collecting personal student information. That student information is part of the admissions process but is also being used to determine "fit" into the program.

The sample of codes consists of the two with the highest frequency across sites from that thematic group. We calculated frequency by code and by site using the count function on the spreadsheet. Sample Analysis B explains how we adapted the frequency count with the few duplicate site survey submissions.

Sample Analysis B. In Table 3, reference numbers 2 and 3 were from the same TPSID site. Two different directors from the same program completed the survey, and website analysis was also completed. All three of those data points had the same results: medical history was required to be submitted as part of the application process. These duplicates were ultimately only counted once in any frequency sums. So, if Table 3 were the entire data set, the frequency of an IEP being needed would be two sites, not three.

We placed notations on some requirements as comments when there were caveats or additional information that would be important to note, such as items that are "recommended" but not required. Site-specific demographic data from the 17 surveys received were analyzed descriptively and comparatively. The overall number of students in the program and the demographic breakdown were analyzed for their mean, median, and mode. Although the survey asked for percentages of each demographic, the researchers discovered that some of the participants incorrectly completed the questions. In some of those cases, it was assumed the participant chose a response that corresponded with the number of students, rather than the percentage of students, within that category. Other participants simply did not respond to the demographic questions about their site. This led to less usable demographic data for comparative analysis. Based in the DSE and DisCrit frameworks, with

Table 2

TPSID Grantee Cohorts 2 and 3

Name of TPSID Grantee	Number of Sites Reviewed in Website Analysis	Number of Survey Participants from Grantee
Appalachian State	1	1
Bergen Community College	2	0
California State University Fresno	1	1
Calvin University	1	2
Colorado State University	1	0
East Tennessee State University	1	1
Georgia State University	1	0
Georgian Court University	1	1
Highline College	1	0
Jacksonville State University	1	0
Lipscomb University	1	0
Millersville University	6	2
Minot State University	2	1
Northern Arizona University	1	1
Ohio State University	1	0
Portland State University	1	0
Rhode Island College	N/A	0
Saint Joseph's University	1	1
Spokane Community College	1	0
Syracuse University	1	1
Taft College	1	0
Texas A&M University	1	0
Texas A&M University - San Antonio	1	1
University of Alabama	1	0
University of California (Davis)	1	1
University of Central Florida	1	0
University of Hawaii at Manoa	1	0
University of Illinois Chicago	1	0
University of Kansas	1	0
University of Memphis	1	0
University of Missouri Kansas City	N/A	0
University of Missouri St. Louis	1	0
University of New Hampshire	1	0
University of North Texas	1	0
University of Rochester	2	0
University of South Alabama	1	0
University of South Carolina	1	1
Utah State University	1	0

(Table 2, continued)

Utah Valley University	1	1
Vanderbilt University	1	1
Washington State University	1	0
TOTAL	47	17

Table 3

Sample Coding Spreadsheet

TPSID SITE	1	2	3	4
IEP Needed	1	2	3	
High School Disciplinary Reports Needed		2	3	
5th Grade Reading Level				4

aims of answering RQ3, the demographic data from a TPSID site was looked at in connection with any eligibility requirements and admissions processes at the same site. Additionally, survey responses as to why certain requirements and processes existed were used in triangulation with demographic information.

Findings

Following the methods previously discussed, our findings are displayed with data from the surveys and website analysis combined. These data are broken down by data that pertains to the three separate research questions. First, we provide findings on the overall scope and breadth of admission requirements in IPSE programs implementing TPSID grants for students with intellectual disability to address RQ1. Then, considering the theoretical frameworks of DSE, DisCrit, and IPSE, we focus on synthesizing the data most relevant for three research questions.

Overall Admission Requirements

Through this research and analysis, we found a total of 222 distinct admissions requirements, consisting of both eligibility requirements and admissions processes, across the 48 program sites in this study. These requirements were analyzed and grouped into the following categories: documentation and eligibility requirements, skill-based requirements, dispositional requirements, safety and behavioral requirements, application requirements, and other requirements.

Documentation and eligibility requirements focus on verifying disability status, education history, and basic personal information. The most commonly required element is documentation of intellectual disability, with 41 programs requiring this verification; an additional 19 programs require specific disability documentation. This near-universal requirement reflects the fundamental eligibility criteria for TPSID programs and aligns with federal definitions for Comprehensive Transition Programs. Similarly, IEP documentation is required by 18 programs, connecting the college admission process to students' secondary education history or additional disability documentation. Eight programs also required a medical history. Most programs also specified age ranges, typically 18-26 (nine programs) or variations such as 18-25 (four programs), 18-28 (five programs), or simply over 18 (seven programs). A few programs accepted students as young as 17. Geographic restrictions were less common but included requirements for enrollment in specific school districts (three programs), county support coordination (three programs) or state agency eligibility (two programs). Technology access was also less common but notable: Two programs required students to have a computer, and five programs required students to have a phone.

Skill-Based requirements varied considerably. Some programs required specific independent living skills (hygiene, time management, medication management), while others focused on academic skills (basic reading, writing, and math at various grade levels) or communication abilities. For example, 15 programs required students to be able to administer their own medications, and some had very specific additional independent living skill requirements,

Table 4

Thematic Headings and Codes Within

Heading	Sample of Codes Within	Eligibility Requirement, Admissions Process, or Both
Technology Access	• Computer Access • Phone Access	Eligibility Requirement
Technology Use for Communication	• Text • Send Email	Admissions Process
Technology Use for Academic Purposes	• Make a PowerPoint • Make a Flipgrid	Admissions Process
Guardianship Related	• Are their own guardian. • Guardianship Form	Both
Diagnosis Related	• Has proof of an Intellectual Disability • Received services through IEP, IDEA, or completed assessment portfolio	Both
High School Related	• High School transcript/ report cards/ education history • Completed High School or Learning Resource Program	Both
Standardized Assessment/ Evaluation	• Psychological Assessment Documents • Behavior Assessment	Both
Program Survey/ Assessment	• Skills Inventory/ Survey • Personal Support Inventory	Both
Generic Information	• Personal Student Information Sheet • Parent Information/ Emergency Contact Information	Both
Reference/ Referral/ Recommendation	• Letters of Rec/ Referral Letter • References Collected	Admissions Process
Application Action	• Interview • Tour/ Preview Day	Both
Other Documentation Needed	• Medical History • Release/ Exchange of Info Form/ FERPA	Both
Money	• Application Cost • Not receiving services from public schools	Both
Family Attitude	• Family dynamics taken into account • Family supports students' pursuit of independence	Both
Independent Living Skills	• Administer Meds • Autonomy/ Independence	Eligibility Requirement
Academic Requirements and Skills	• Basic Skills in Math • Basic Skills in Reading/ Literacy	Both
Academic Disposition	• Interested/ Motivated • Potential to Succeed/ Achieve desired goals	Both

(Table 4, continued)

Need to be able to use communication to...	• Effective/ Functional Communication • Ask for help/ Advocate for needs	Both
General environment disposition	• Agrees to follow University policies • Seeking employment/ interest in gaining employment	Both
Student is safe while...	• Navigating independently • Being unsupervised	Both
Age at start	• 18-26 • Over 18	Eligibility Requirement
Location	• Enrolled in county supports coordination/ OVR/ Waiver at start • From specific School district	Eligibility Requirement

Table 5

Guardianship Related Code Frequencies

Guardianship	Required	Recommended
They are their own guardian	3	3
They need to submit a guardianship-related form	2	1
They are not under full guardianship or any social guardianship	1	0
Supported Decision Making agreement can apply - decided on an individual basis	1	0
A parent/ guardian memorandum of understanding is needed	1	0

Table 6

Documentation Related Code Frequencies

Documentation	Required	Recommended
Intellectual Disability Diagnosis	41	0
Individualized Education Program (IEP)	12	5
High School Standard Diploma, GED, Certificate of Completion, or Social Diploma	11	1
High School Transcripts, Report Cards, and/or Education History	10	2
Comprehensive or Psycho-Educational Evaluations	8	6
Release/ FERPA/ Exchange of Information Form	7	0
Medical History	6	2
Proof of Health Insurance	5	0

such as "able to walk 2-4 miles each school day" (one program), use a microwave (two programs), ability to shower (five programs), or prepare simple meals (two programs). Several programs required basic computer literacy (three programs), while others required specific technology skills such as the ability to make a PowerPoint (one program), make a Flipgrid (two programs), or use a calculator (one program). Data showed seven programs that required specific minimum grade-level academic skills, such as reading, writing, or math. One program studied followed typical college academic admission standards, while five specifically stated that students in the IPSE program would not be able to enroll in a "traditional" college, even with accommodations. Only one program required standardized test scores in the form of the SAT or ACT.

Dispositional requirements were also common. The requirement that students demonstrate interest and motivation appeared in 21 programs' admissions requirements, indicating that programs prioritized student buy-in and self-direction in addition to academic skill sets. Beyond motivation, other requirements included emotional stability (six programs), emotional maturity (six programs), willingness to live independently (six programs), and agreement to follow university policies (12 programs). A more nebulous "potential to succeed in the program or achieve desired goals/outcomes" was sought by nine programs. Other programs asked for a willingness to sit in class/seminar/labs, sometimes for a minimum amount of time (seven programs), participate in class (five programs), participate in extracurricular activities for at least 10 hours per week (one program), or participate in program activities for at least 25 hours per week (one program).

Safety and behavioral requirements also appeared frequently, with 17 programs requiring students to be safe while unsupervised and 15 requiring the ability to navigate campus independently. Five programs explicitly required no history of physical harm to self or others. Less frequent but notable requirements were student safety while crossing the street (two programs), no concern of elopement (one program), and no communicable medical conditions by casual contact (three programs). Programs required acceptable social behavior (eight programs), or other requirements such as understanding boundaries (one program), lack of anxiousness (one program), trustworthiness (one program), ability to accept personal responsibility (two programs), and self-respect (three programs).

Admissions process and other requirements included interviews (17 programs), campus tours or preview days (nine programs), essays or personal statements (14 programs, depending on format flexibility), and student observations (four programs). Eleven programs charged an application fee. Other financial requirements were rare, with some programs requiring proof of health insurance (six programs), ability to pay through service funds (one program), or income equivalent to SSI minimums (one program). Family support was also a criterion for admission in some programs. Family dynamics (two programs) and family support of pursuit of independence (five programs) were found to be considerations for admission in these seven programs.

Research Question 1: Eligibility Requirements

The average number of codes found per program was 16, with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 59. Thirteen programs had fewer than five requirements for eligibility prior to the application process. Although we quantified program requirements for analysis, the study does not intend to evaluate programs based solely on the number of coded eligibility requirements and application processes found. See the discussion section of this manuscript for additional discourse on this topic.

Although 222 total codes were denoted across all programs included in the study, due to manuscript space constraints, we selected three focal eligibility coding categories for in-depth analysis (guardianship, documentation, and dispositions and achievements), and one overall application processes category. Additional coded domains will be explored in subsequent publications. These coded areas were selected for this manuscript because they most closely aligned with the research questions through the theoretical lenses, emphasizing the impact of social constructs of disability and ableist expectations of students on the application and admission process in IPSE. Note that an absence of the requirement in the data does not equate to "Not required"; instead, it means that there was no evidence of the requirement on the program's website or mentioned in survey responses.

Guardianship Requirements

As shown in Table 5, four programs required students to serve as their own legal guardians (three required self-guardianship, and one also prohibited "social guardianship"). When asked in the survey, *What other skills does your program require students to have before being admitted, and how do you measure them*? one program director said, "Students must hold their own guardianship." In the website analysis, another program listed that they were designed to support students who "serve as their own full legal guardian. Individuals with ID who have a supported decision-making agreement are also encouraged to

apply, and decisions will be made on an individual basis." Several programs required students to submit guardianship forms during the application process.

Documentation Requirements

There was wide variation in the number and types of documents required for application to each IPSE program, as seen in Table 6. Most commonly, programs required or recommended proof of intellectual disability diagnosis and/or submission of an individualized education program (IEP) from high school or prior education. Many programs also required a previous evaluation report, such as a comprehensive psychological or educational evaluation. Eight programs required or recommended medical history forms. In addition, some programs required some kind of high school diploma or proof of completion, transcripts, or report cards. When asked about these requirements in the survey, one director responded, "The IEP and most recent evaluations are reviewed to gain information on current academic, social, and functional skills; the admissions teams complete a rubric on how easily the needs of the students can be supported at the University." It must be noted that TPSIDs are required to verify a student's status as having an intellectual disability, potentially shedding light on the underlying rationale for these requirements.

Student Disposition and Achievement Requirements

Table 7 illustrates some student dispositions (often seen as personal, social, or behavioral skills) and achievement requirements across the TPSID programs analyzed in this study. Many of the programs required or recommended minimum reading and math comprehension levels. In response to the survey question, *What are the academic skills requirements and how are they measured?* one director explained, "All students have an intake meeting one-on-one with a staff member where all skills are examined. One straightforward requirement is 3rd grade reading level or above." Another director responded, "We have a skills assessment for students to take that varies from academic to personal care. Primarily, students need to have the ability to focus and stay on task in the classroom without support, navigate campus, and manage their items. Placement testing is waived for folks who enter the program." Two programs reported requiring the same college-level placement tests as all other students. One of those directors said, "Participants have to meet admission standards for the community or 4-year college they are attending, which typically includes secondary level reading and math comprehension skills. Skills are measured based on admission acceptance and number of <100 level classes taken."

Regarding communication requirements, three programs required verbal communication, and one recommended it. The program that indicated verbal communication was recommended in their survey that "Verbal Ability (Vocal or AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication)) to engage in conversational exchanges" is required. Another program did not specify the type of communication needed. Still, it did say, "We don't have a specific level required, but a student needs to show basic communication skills that shows they can be safe on their own and advocate for their basic needs."

Research Question 2: Admissions Processes

Interviews and tours as part of the application process were common. Directors were surveyed about how interviews and tours were used in their decision-making process for admission. Most responses indicated a desire to learn more about student abilities and behaviors through interviews and tour experiences. One director explained the following:

> We gather more information that helps us make our selections during our preview days than we do during the interviews. We are able to gauge much about their physical abilities, their social skills, their levels of interest and independence, their affect, their academic skills and problem-solving and self-advocacy skills. We can also get a good sense of how important going to college is to the candidate.

A few directors explained how their programs used interviews and tours to help the students understand the university and the program. One director added the following:

> Our program focuses on radical inclusivity; participants experience college in the same manner as their non-disabled peers…Non-disabled students are typically invited to tour their prospective campus, and we invite our students to tour the campus as well. We introduce students to key areas on campus, such as financial aid and disability resources, so they know where these resources are located. Immersing the student in the college environment also improves student intrinsic motivation.

In addition to interviews and tours, almost half of the programs required references or letters of recommendation as part of their regular application process, as seen in Table 8. Some programs required an application fee.

Table 7

Student Disposition and Achievement Code Frequencies

Student Disposition and Achievement	Required	Recommended
Interested/ Motivation for College	21	0
Autonomy/ Independence	12	1
Administer own medications	12	2
Seeking employment/ interest in gaining employment	12	0
Readiness Surveys, Support Surveys, or Skill Inventories	11	2
Specific Reading or Math Level (2nd - 5th grade)	11	3
Potential to succeed/ achieve program goals	8	1
Behavior Assessments or Observations	7	3
Verbal Communication	3	1

Table 8

Application Process Code Frequencies

Application Process	Required	Recommended
Letters of Recommendation/ Referral Letters/ References	21	0
Interview	15	2
Tour/ Preview Day	8	1
Application Fee	7	3
Summer Experience Before Acceptance	1	1

Research Question 3: Potential Effects on Program Diversity

Data from the 17 surveys that had most of the demographic information completed is shown in Table 9. We have described the general region of each program site from which demographic information was received. The United States currently has 10 regional alliances, representing states that work together on IPSE coordination (Think College, 2025). We had representation from eight of those regions: Four Corners, Great Lakes Postsecondary Education Alliance (GLIPSEA), Mid-Atlantic Alliance for Inclusive Higher Education (MIDA), Northeast Inclusive Postsecondary Education Alliance (NEPSEA), Red River Higher Education Alliance (RRHEA), Southeast Postsecondary Education Alliance (SEPSEA), Upper Midwest Regional Alliance, and Western States.

In terms of racial breakdown, the majority of students in this subset of programs were White, with eight of them declaring 70% or more as White. One program had 100% enrollment of Hispanic/Latino students. All other programs had other racial categories listed as 50% or less of their student population. A majority of reporting programs (n=10 out of 17) did not complete the socioeconomic status section. Of the programs that did, there were more programs that listed student household incomes above $75,000 than below, indicating above–average family socioeconomic status for program participants. One program did not complete the gender related questions of the survey. A majority of programs (n=11) have more than half of their students identifying as male. There were four programs with a female identifying majority, one program with an equal split male/female, and one program that listed nonbinary as part of their student population.

Table 9

Site Specific Demographics

Site Number	Site Demographic Specifics
2	**Region:** GLIPSEA **Racial Breakdown:** 77% White, 18% Black/African American, 10% Multiracial **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** No Response **Gender Breakdown:** 60% Male, 40% Female
4	**Region:** RRHEA **Racial Breakdown:** 100% Hispanic/Latino **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** 98% $75-100,000 **Gender Breakdown:** 66% Male, 33% Female
6	**Region:** MIDA **Racial Breakdown:** 43% White, 14% Black/African American, 43% Asian **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** No Response **Gender Breakdown:** 80% Male, 20% Female
7	**Region:** SEPSEA **Racial Breakdown:** 70% White, 30% Black/African American, 1% Asian **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** No Response **Gender Breakdown:** 50% Male, 50% Female
8	**Region:** MIDA **Racial Breakdown:** 50% White, 50% Hispanic/Latino **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** No Response **Gender Breakdown:** 100% Male
9	**Region:** MIDA **Racial Breakdown:** 80% White, 10% Asian, 10% Indian/Alaska Native **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** No Response **Gender Breakdown:** 40% Male, 60% Female
10	**Region:** Western States **Racial Breakdown:** 40% White, 5% Black/African American, 20% Hispanic/Latino, 7% Asian, 15% Hawaiian, 3% Indian/Alaska Native, 10% Multiracial **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** 5% $25-50,000, 5% $50-75,000, 20% $75-100,000, 40% $100-150,000, 20% 150-200,000, 10% over $200,000 **Gender Breakdown:** 80% Male, 20% Female
11	**Region:** Upper Midwest **Racial Breakdown:** 80% White, 13% Indian/Alaska Native, 6% Multiracial **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** 20% $50-75,000, 26% $75-100,000, 26% $100-150,000, 20% 150-200,000, 6% over $200,000 **Gender Breakdown:** 73% Male, 26% Female
13	**Region:** Four Corners **Racial Breakdown:** 61% White, 5% Hispanic/Latino, 11% Indian/Alaska Native, 22% Multiracial **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** No Response **Gender Breakdown:** No Response

17	**Region:** Western States **Racial Breakdown:** 20% Black/African American, 10% Hispanic/Latino, 50% Asian, 10% Multiracial, 10% other **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** No Response **Gender Breakdown:** 40% Male, 60% Female
25	**Region:** GLIPSEA **Racial Breakdown:** 64% White, 20% Black/African American, 8% Hispanic/Latino, 8% Multiracial **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** No Response **Gender Breakdown:** 92% Male, 8% Female
27	**Region:** MIDA **Racial Breakdown:** 62% White, 10% Black/African American, 15% Hispanic/Latino, 3% Asian **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** 15% $25-50,000, 30% $75-100,000, 20% $100-150,000, 20% 150-200,000, 15% over $200,000 **Gender Breakdown:** 30% Male, 70% Female
30	**Region:** SEPSEA **Racial Breakdown:** 95% White, 5% Black/African American **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** 45% $25-50,000, 50% $50-75,000, 5% $75-100,000 **Gender Breakdown:** 57% Male, 43% Female
32*	**Region:** Four Corners **Racial Breakdown:** 100% White **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** No Response **Gender Breakdown:** 66% Male, 33% Female
39	**Region:** NEPSEA **Racial Breakdown:** 77% White, 18% Black/African American, 1% Hispanic/Latino, 3% Asian, 1% Hawaiian, 1% Indian/Alaska Native **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** 1% below $25,000, 7% $25-50,000, 7% $50-75,000, 36% $75-100,000, 52% $100-150,000, 10% 150-200,000, 1% over $200,000 G**ender Breakdown:** 60% Male, 39% Female, 1% Nonbinary
42*	**Region:** SEPSEA **Racial Breakdown:** 54% White, 23% Black/African American, 15% Hispanic/Latino, 8% Asian **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** 15% below $25,000, 15% $25-50,000, 15% $50-75,000,15% $75-100,000, 8% $100-150,000, 8% 150-200,000, 23% over $200,000 **Gender Breakdown:** 69% Male, 31% Female
48	**Region:** SEPSEA **Racial Breakdown:** 72% White, 17% Black/African American, 3% Hispanic/Latino, 3% Multiracial **Socioeconomic Status Breakdown:** No Response **Gender Breakdown:** 30% Male, 70% Female

Note. *Sites with less than 20 students total at the time of survey completion.

Due to the limited demographic responses, we were not able to discern if there was an expressed connection between demographic diversity at a program site and their eligibility requirements and admissions processes (RQ3). In the discussion, we will comment on this limitation.

Discussion

Programs examined within this data set range in their requirements for admission, including variations in categories such as documentation and eligibility requirements, skill-based requirements, dispositional requirements, safety and behavioral requirements, application process, and other requirements. In this section, we discuss each of these requirement categories, contextualizing with previous research in the field.

Documentation and Eligibility Requirements

Documentation and eligibility requirements represented a significant portion of admission criteria, with identification of intellectual disability being the most common requirement. This finding is logical, given that a key requirement for TPSID funding is that programs serve students with intellectual disability, and verification through an IEP, school evaluation, or medical history helps verify eligibility while providing documentation that may also be needed for access to college or university disability support services. However, Cook et al., (2015) caution against excluding students from postsecondary opportunities based on diagnosis alone, noting that this population has particular strengths and challenges that should be recognized and supported in the transition. From a DSE perspective, reliance on single documents or even structural systems risks reinforcing practices that serve to label, disable and often exclude the students meant to be supported. In practice, we can consider challenges in obtaining updated or accurate psychoeducational evaluations, particularly if students have already exited the k-12 system, or difficulty qualifying for IPSE if intellectual disability is not a primary diagnosis and is, instead, secondary or unlisted.

Eleven of the programs in the study also required proof of high school completion. High school completion is a typical entrance requirement for college, and at first glance, may seem routine. However, given the wide range of school experiences from which students with intellectual disability are transitioning, completion may not be available for all students. Varying by state, school district, or other factors, some students have been placed in segregated settings due only to their disability label, or denied a diploma based on standardized assessments (Irwin et al., 2023). This requirement reflects an assumption that traditional academic benchmarks are necessary indicators of readiness, rather than considering the diverse ways students demonstrate competence and college potential as CTP and HEOA guidelines allow. Individual programs, however, are permitted to have their own additional eligibility criteria.

Four of the programs in the study required that students be their own legal guardians for admission. Smith-Hill et al., (2023) found in their research that while guardianship is typically a legal determination made by the courts based on an individual's decision-making capacity, it is often framed within transition planning for students with intellectual disability as a routine or expected path for support. Guardianship decisions depend highly on family circumstances, attitudinal beliefs about disability, and awareness of options (Jameson et al., 2015; Smith-Hill et al., 2023; Walters & Plotner, 2024). It follows that this requirement might be necessary in some programs, especially for students who plan to live on campus or be expected to have high levels of independence in the university setting. When a student has guardianship of themself, they can make decisions without parental approval, which may streamline decision-making in the college setting in many circumstances.

However, requiring legal independence for program admission not only disadvantages students whose families pursued guardianship, but it also reinforces structures that equate independence with worthiness or readiness for higher education. Moreover, the implications of guardianship extend beyond program admission. Even when students with intellectual disability are admitted to a university, guardianship status may continue to restrict their access to key aspects of the college experience such as living on campus or taking part in study abroad or other programs. These limitations further marginalize students and create a stratified postsecondary experience, where those under guardianship may be excluded from the full benefits of college life. Beyond the programs included in this study, it is likely that guardianship functions as a broader systemic barrier across many institutions, warranting more consideration and reform. Guardianship is a larger conversation beyond the admissions space in the intellectual disability field. (Smith-Hill et al., 2023; Walters & Plotner, 2024)

Seven programs required students to sign Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) waivers, allowing parents direct access to and communication with university staff. This finding follows research that highlights the positive correlation between family involvement and postsecondary success (Graff et al., 2019; Griffin et al., 2010; Rowe et al.,

2015), and waiving FERPA rights, even partially, may lead to increased communication between parents and university supports. From a DisCrit standpoint, this finding raises concerns about how intersecting systems of ableism and adultism operate within higher education. Such policies implicitly question the agency and autonomy of disabled students, particularly those who may already face other forms of marginalization (e.g., race, class, or gender), reinforcing systemic inequities. Although it would seem that the FERPA requirement and admissions processes would highly correlate to the previously discussed guardianship requirement, there was only one program where both codes appeared.

Another requirement was proof of health insurance. Five programs required students to provide this documentation before admission, while others did so before enrollment. This requirement is common for all university students, especially for students living in campus housing. However, due to the non-matriculated status of many IPSE students, they may be excluded from university-sponsored student health plans, despite their CTP status as students. This exclusion reflects a structural oversight that can further exclude students with intellectual disability, particularly those from low-income backgrounds who may not have access to private insurance. This requirement may help institutions manage their risk and protect students who have insurance from higher medical costs. Within a DSE and DisCrit framework, such requirements illustrate how institutional policies, though appearing neutral, can reinforce exclusion and stratification, particularly for students who live at the intersections of multiple marginalizations.

Some programs also required access to technology, like a computer or a phone, for program eligibility. McConnell (2021) noted the importance of technology in today's postsecondary environment, and it is not uncommon for college students to be required to have their own access to computers. While personal phones seem so ubiquitous today, some students with intellectual disability have had limited access to personal devices for either safety and vulnerability concerns, caregiver gatekeeping, financial concerns, or perceived lack of capacity (Chadwick, 2022). Computer or phone ownership as an admission requirement may add financial or logistical hurdles for some students, so programs should be aware and consider potential alternatives, such as computer lab access or a technology lending library, along with support to improve digital literacy skills in real-life instances, as Chadwick's (2022) research suggests.

Skill-Based Requirements

Skill-based requirements varied across programs, encompassing independent living skills such as hygiene, time management, and medication management; academic skills such as basic reading, writing, and math at various grade levels; technology proficiency; and communication abilities. These reflect the unique position of IPSE programs within higher education. Because the HEOA established an alternative admission pathway for students with intellectual disability, programs do not rely on traditional metrics like GPA or standardized test scores (such as the SAT or ACT) to evaluate applicants. Instead, they have developed alternative criteria to assess whether students are prepared for college-level expectations and are a good fit for the program's structure. Prior research further connects skill-based criteria and family expectations. Sheen et al., (2022) identified a list of IPSE preparation items based on the results of their parent study which

> focused more on what we categorized as either IL (independent living) skills (i.e., able to manage medications independently, demonstrates basic hygiene skills, accepts responsibility for their actions, and demonstrates knowledge of personal safety awareness), or social/working with other skills (i.e., able to follow instructions/directions, able to ask for help/clarification across a variety of settings, is kind to self and others). (p. 7)

These items mirror the functional and independent living skills that some programs assess during admissions. However, these alternative criteria can serve as barriers to postsecondary education for students with intellectual disability, particularly when programs specify that students must communicate verbally or demonstrate "functional" or "effective" communication. Such expectations reflect a logic grounded in normative standards of academic and communicative performance. Although IPSE programs are explicitly designed to serve students who do not meet traditional college admission standards, some programs reproduce exclusion by developing new academic thresholds, creating alternative gatekeeping that contradicts the foundational intent of the HEOA and the TPSID model demonstration program (Think College, 2022, 2025). A DisCrit lens highlights how these layered requirements—academic, communicative, and behavioral—may disproportionately and perhaps unintentionally impact marginalized students. Skill based requirements, as part of admissions in IPSE, in many ways align with program goals. However, they could also create additional barriers given that some

students may not have access to opportunities to develop these skills through their high school transition supports, potentially preventing otherwise qualified students from accessing IPSE.

Dispositional Requirements

Dispositional requirements such as motivation, maturity, or emotional stability were also required. A substantial number of programs required demonstrated interest in college, an understanding of self-direction, or other indicators of college or program readiness, echoing what Sheen, et al., (2022) described as these dispositional qualities. Programs often justified these expectations by citing concerns about student success, particularly tied to lack of motivation or readiness for independence (Friesland & King, 2012; Griffin & Papay, 2017). Without traditional academic standards to rely on for admissions, many programs may be looking for ways to ascertain student readiness, cohort fit, and support needs.

Safety and Behavioral Requirements

Safety and behavioral requirements appeared frequently among program admission criteria as well. Programs commonly required students to demonstrate independence and safety or campus navigation; others explicitly required no history of harm to self or others. These findings align with Griffin and Papay's (2017) identification of common admission prerequisites of safety and navigation. The authors provide context for these requirements, noting concerns around student vulnerability potentially increasing the need for both screening of students and skill development once in program. Sheen et al. (2022) similarly found that parents prioritized safety, personal awareness, and emotional regulation. Griffin et al. (2019) also reported that parents identified safety as their main concern, which suggests parent priorities may be in alignment with these admission practices. However, it should be noted that many students seeking enrollment may have had limited chances to independently navigate their communities prior to application; these criteria could screen out students based on lack of experience rather than lack of capacity.

Admission Process and Other Requirements

Some admission processes were similar to typical admission practices, such as requirements for essays, personal statements, or letters of recommendation. Other requirements were partially or substantially different, such as interviews, mandatory campus tours or preview days, and student observations. Matriculated students, for example, are rarely asked about their capacity to manage medications or perform daily living tasks. Such questions may be relevant in IPSE admissions, however, if a program is considering available supports or residential options.

Family support also emerged as an admission criteria, with some programs evaluating family dynamics or family support for the student's "pursuit of independence." Research offers insight into why programs might evaluate family support during admissions. Francis et al. (2019) observed variations in parent engagement in the college transition, with responses ranging from hypervigilance to a more hands-off approach. Parents questioned independence and instead considered ideas of interdependence in a college setting. Friesland and King (2012) noted families valued the peer relationships their students could build, but to establish these, students required more independence from their parents. These studies suggest that programs may be considering admission practices to ensure that parent, student, and program expectations align.

Graff et al. (2019) created an instrument to assess whether parents are prepared to support growing student autonomy. Critically, they cautioned that the tool should identify families who might benefit from additional guidance rather than exclude their students from admission. Following a similar concern, Kelley and Prohn (2019) found that families consistently held more modest postsecondary aspirations than students themselves, with a larger gap for students with higher support needs, often due to inadequate information about available options. Martinez et al. (2012) similarly documented widespread gaps in parent knowledge about transition pathways and found that educators sometimes misread the engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse families. These findings suggest that when programs use family support for admissions, they may unintentionally exclude students whose families encountered systemic barriers to accessing information rather than families who would not support their student's college participation.

Demographic Connections

Although the demographic data we collected by site were minimal, there are some clear gaps in terms of diversity across the 17 sites. There was a high prevalence of majority White students, and a high majority of male students. With more SES data, we hoped to be able to draw connections between site diversity and the admissions codes at the same site. Take, for example, an application fee and required proof of income; while these requirements are not unlike those of other college students, they may lead to decreased socioeconomic diversity if students cannot afford the program or access the same safety nets, such as fee waivers and

merit scholarships. With these limited demographic data, we could not conclude how requirements relate to admission rates of individuals with marginalized racial or socioeconomic status to answer RQ3. Examining eligibility requirements and admission processes with demographic data such as race and family income is recommended for future research.

Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

Although we received at least partial survey responses from 17 IPSE directors for this pilot study, the lack of complete responses from participants was a limitation. Future research could address this by recruiting a sample from all IPSE directors or all TPSID sites, instead of a small subset from each TPSID grantee. Expansion of the study to non-TPSID IPSE programs, to all TPSID cohorts, or to include the available TPSID demographic data would strengthen future studies. Self-report bias is an additional limitation of the study. Survey responses relied on the self-reports of program directors on admission practices and may have been inaccurate or aspirational. The cross-sectional design is also a limitation, as information was taken at one point in time for program admissions. As programs develop or evolve, it is likely that admission policies and practices develop and change as well. This study did not examine outcome data or compare admission practices to application or admission rates. Additionally, geographic and institutional diversity was not studied in relation to admission practices; for example, how a community college in the southwest might differ from a public university in the northeast for admissions.

Missing data are another significant limitation. Survey responses were limited and incomplete, and there were not enough demographic data available to answer RQ3. Using public website information created additional limitations, as data gathered online were sometimes incomplete. For example, in some cases, data were incomplete because the TPSID program removed admissions information outside of the admissions season. In a few instances with Cohort 2, the program site could not be found and may have no longer existed at the time of data collection. With Cohort 3, some programs were not yet fully operational when data were collected, leading to additional missing information. Future research could collect website data during the typical admissions season (winter-early spring) and use a more systematic data collection and analysis tool, like MaxQDA, to ensure coding and analyses are consistent across the research team. Future data collection and analysis could be strengthened by separating web analysis data and survey data. Future studies should also consider utilizing a consistent database of demographic data to analyze in concert with updated admission policies and practices, which could provide a more complete examination of RQ3. It would also be useful to hear from students, families, and program staff about their experiences in the admission process, particularly as students begin to apply to multiple programs with some geographic or resource diversity.

Conclusion

This study provides the first baseline examination of admission practices across TPSID-funded IPSE programs in the United States, which shape access to higher education for students with intellectual disability. The alternative admission pathway established by HEOA has created access to higher education that did not exist before for students with intellectual disability, reflecting a significant shift in educational equity in the postsecondary educational space. However, as this research demonstrates, these alternative criteria can potentially create new barriers. Moving forward, programs should critically and regularly examine their admission practices, considering not only the programmatic implications but the systemic and potentially exclusionary ones as well.

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