Quality Indicators for AT in Post-Secondary Education

A person with a disability who uses or needs AT can face a number of very real challenges and barriers when entering education programs after high school. The Quality Indicators for AT in Post-Secondary Education (QIAT-PS) project has developed tools and resources in an effort to address some of these issues. QIAT-PS aims to help programs develop high quality assistive technology (AT) service delivery in post-secondary educational environments. The QIAT-PS project is sponsored by the Great Lakes ADA Center and the Southwest ADA Center, which are funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR). QIAT-PS is a collaborative effort of hundreds of professionals from a wide variety of higher education and K-12 schools.

The QIAT-PS project began in 2009 with a nationwide survey of students with AT needs in post-secondary settings. The results of the survey clearly demonstrated that students bear a high level of responsibility for the integration of their use of AT in higher education settings. The results also confirmed that there was a need for programs that serve students with disabilities in post-secondary education settings to improve the quality and effectiveness of their AT supports.

Some initial survey findings included the following:
- Students were often unaware of their legal rights, of the practical factors associated with their AT use and the supports for AT use that they might need in adult environments.
- K-12 transition efforts were often inadequate or ineffective in preparing students who use AT to be successful in post-secondary educational environments.
- Disability support services staff concerned with AT often express the feeling that they operate in a vacuum on their campuses and that continuous improvement efforts were difficult or impossible because of the wide variety of student requirements for accommodations and support.

With these needs in mind, the QIAT-PS project developed quality indicators, self-evaluation tools and resources to help higher educational institutions improve AT service delivery, as well as student focused resources to increase self-advocacy skills and successful integration of AT in post-secondary education. All QIAT-PS tools and resources are

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available, at no cost, on the Web page at www.qiat-ps.org.

THE QIAT-PS INDICATORS

The QIAT-PS indicators are a set of statements that describe the characteristics of high-quality AT services provided to students in post-secondary educational environments. The indicators are divided into five general areas. Each area has five indicators or descriptors of quality.

The areas are:
- Awareness and Eligibility
- Planning and Implementation
- Evaluation of Effectiveness
- Administrative Support
- Professional Development and Training

QIAT-PS Indicator Area: Awareness and Eligibility

The Awareness and Eligibility area describes the steps that programs take to make sure that students with disabilities are aware of AT services on the campus and know how to get access to them. The indicators themselves include ensuring that promotional materials and awareness materials address AT and that there are in-house referral systems and assessments for AT services that address the student's past and potential use of AT. The indicators also address the need for campus-wide information technology to be accessible.

QIAT-PS Indicator Area: Planning and Implementation

The Planning and Implementation area describes the things that programs do to make sure that students are able to use their AT devices as accommodations in classrooms and other campus settings. The indicators address the program's systems for identifying a student's overall need for accommodations and the specific accommodations they may need; systems for monitoring student performance in the use of AT; integration of

Figure 1: QIAT-PS Web page

student-owned AT into the educational program; and, finally, systems to facilitate problem-solving around AT when things don't go as planned.

QIAT-PS Indicator Area: Evaluation of Effectiveness

Evaluation of effectiveness addresses activities that programs engage in to help ensure that their AT services are effective and as efficient as possible. These actions include monitoring academic environments, as well as physical access and campus attitudes about AT use. The indicators also describe the need for planning to evaluate AT services and AT device use by students; reviewing data that is collected during the evaluation; and making adjustments to the program, based on that data review.

QIAT-PS Indicator Area: Administrative Support

The administrative supports that are necessary in order to ensure continuity of program improvement efforts are described in this area. The indicators address the development of policies, procedures and other supports needed

in order to maintain and improve AT programs at the post-secondary level. They address procedural guidelines and their broad dissemination. The administrative support indicators also suggest that programs need a systematic AT grievance or complaint procedure for times when students are dissatisfied with the services that they are receiving. It is administration's role to ensure that qualified support persons are available in an AT program. This requires budgets and financial resources necessary to operate the program.

QIAT-PS Indicator Area: Professional Development and Training

Professional development and training describes critical features of AT training efforts for all staff and other key players in the AT program. It includes indicators such as ensuring that professional development is available to all groups of staff who come in contact with students who use AT. Other indicators ensure that professional development is based on adult learning models and aligned with other agency initiatives.

Table 1: Awareness and Eligibility Indicators

Category	Indicator
Promotional materials and awareness	The institution has and disseminates promotional materials and conducts student orientation activities that are accessible to all students during orientation, including a list of AT available.
Written descriptions, eligibility, documentation and services	The institution has and disseminates material, regarding the use of AT, where the eligibility process is clearly stated. It includes an explanation of required documentation and disability disclosure necessary.
In-house referral for AT services	The disability service office has an in-house or referral-based process for basic assessment and selection of appropriate AT.
Intake questions about AT	The intake process of the disability services office includes information and questions about previous AT use.
Promote Accessible IT	The disabilities service office supports the accessibility of the information technology infrastructure, such as accessible website to register for classes or a work station with AT in each computer lab.

Table 2: Planning and Implementation Indicators

Category	Indicator
Identify need for accommodations	The disability service office staff facilitate the exploration of an individual's disability and assists him/her in understanding the need for and various types of accommodations.
Identify specific accommodations	The planning includes the delineation of all accommodation specifics, such as disclosure, note-taking or environmental considerations.
Monitor performance and use of AT	Disability service office staff assist the student in monitoring performance and the use of assistive and required information technology and related accommodations.
Integration of student-owned AT	The disability service office supports the integration and use of student-owned AT supports into the curricular and extracurricular activities of the university when requested and in accordance with the written policy.
Integration of AT with Accessible IT	The disability service office facilitates collaboration, planning, problem solving and coordination between students, various instructional and support personnel in solving AT challenges and problems, including accessibility of institutional information technology.

Table 3: Evaluation of Effectiveness Indicators

Category	Indicator
Plan for evaluation of AT provided to students	The evaluation documentation gathered by the disability service office on AT includes enough data to evaluate how AT impacts a student's ability to stay in a class, program, or graduate and is used to improve student outcomes.
Plan for evaluation of AT use and review of data	Effectiveness of assistive technology is evaluated in not only academic environments, but also in physical access, campus attitude and accessibility of institutional information technology.

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AT evaluated in non-academic settings	The disability service office has a plan for evaluating the effectiveness of provided AT that is responsive to current student need and is reviewed periodically and changed as necessary.
Data reflects impact of AT use	The disability service office documents the effectiveness of assistive technologies and the evaluation data is regularly reviewed for the overall impact and effectiveness of AT compared to other accommodations.
Evaluation results are communicated	The effectiveness concerning the use of AT is communicated to all stakeholders in the institution, including individual students, relevant departments and administration.

Table 4: Administrative Support Indicators

Category	Indicator
Procedural guidelines for AT	The institution has written procedural guidelines for accessing and providing AT services that are consistent with federal, state and local laws to ensure equitable access for students with disabilities.
Guidelines broadly disseminated	The institution's written procedural guidelines about AT are broadly disseminated.
Systemic AT grievance/ complaint	The institution has a systematic process to handle grievances and complaints related to the use and support of AT or inaccessible institutional information technology.
Qualified support personnel	The institution employs personnel with the competencies needed to support quality AT services within their primary areas of responsibility at all levels of the organization.
AT in budgeting and planning process	The institution includes AT, supports and services in the technology planning and budgeting process.

Table 5: Professional Development and Training Indicators

Category	Indicator
AT PD opportunities for staff	The disability service office provides staff opportunities for professional development on AT, including ongoing learning opportunities that utilize local, regional and national resources and involve a variety of formats for training.
PD based on adult learning models	Professional development and training in AT follow research-based models for adult learning that include multiple formats, delivered at multiple skills levels and are driven by individual preferences and needs.
PD aligned with agency learning initiatives	AT professional development and training is aligned with other institutional initiatives and/or services.
Student training available	The disabilities services office arranges opportunities for training on AT for students with a disability when requested through the planning process.
AT PD available to a wider institutional audience	The disability services office leads the institution by example and offers assistive and accessible technology professional development to a wider institutional audience.

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THE QIAT-PS CAMPUS SELF-EVALUATION MATRIX

One of the primary interactive tools developed by QIAT-PS is the Campus Self-Evaluation Matrix. This tool is intended to be used for internal program evaluation and goal-setting to improve AT services and supports. The Campus Self-Evaluation Matrix has a descriptive self-rating scale for all five of the indicator areas. An individual or team using the tool chooses the indicator variation from 1 to 5 that most closely matches their program, 1 being a novice and 5 being expert or advanced. There is a notes section to add details about the matrix score.

The tool can be downloaded as a PDF file or used through an accessible, online version. If you create a free account on the website, you may keep multiple versions of your Campus Self-Evaluation Matrix results, create comparison reports and generate action plans with goal and activity reminders.

QIAT-PS CAMPUS SELF-EVALUATION MATRIX PILOT STUDY

While all QIAT-PS materials are available to the general public, a group of specific schools participated in a pilot study to validate the usability and effectiveness of the Campus Self-Evaluation Matrix tool.

As part of their participation, each school agreed to share information about the demographics, culture and needs of the organization for accommodations and AT. A site coordinator was identified for each study site. Schools received direct training on the use of the Campus Self-evaluation Matrix and agreed to complete the matrix at the beginning and end of the study activities. Using the Campus Self-evaluation Matrix, each school identified areas of need and created an improvement and intervention plan that was shared with the QIAT-PS project leaders. Finally, site coordinators provided responses to a validation survey and evaluation interview at

Figure 2: Accessible, online version of the QIAT-PS Campus Self-Evaluation Matrix, sample screen

the end of their program's participation in the pilot.

PILOT STUDY RESULTS

Data analysis showed that 80% of respondents found the matrix very useful in their program improvement efforts, while the remaining 20% rated it useful. Narrative responses included comments like the following:
- Helped us identify areas of strength, which we could share with administration. Helped us identify areas of need, which we can target on next fiscal year's action plan and be deliberate in how to move forward.
- This was our first real opportunity to look at AT from the whole university perspective, not just within our individual silos.
- I felt that, overall, the reflection process was extremely valuable for our team. It allowed us to look broadly at several key areas of AT and expand our focus beyond merely providing/training for students with various AT to wider

campus-wide efforts to educate and integrate AT.

When asked to describe how AT service delivery changed because of participation in the project, respondents indicated that they were able to identify and focus on specific items for improvement as a result of the QIAT-PS indicator structure. Below are two comments from the final survey that are representative of the feedback.
- There will be much more training from the system (and vendor) level. There will be efforts to increase awareness and visibility of AT across the system. There will be emphasis to promote Universal Design where and when possible.
- We saw multiple ways that we could bring more focus to AT issues, most of which were easy to implement.
- We will be using this tool annually to track and compare our AT progress year to year.

The action plans by pilot study sites included some simple and low cost improvements, such as adding AT ques-

tions to intake forms, as well as more extensive multi-year efforts, such as collecting and cross referencing data on student retention rates and AT use or initiating a review of campus-wide information technology, such as websites, for accessibility.

PILOT STUDY SCHOOLS
Schools participating in usability study
- Arkansas State University
- Augsburg College
- City Colleges of Chicago
- Ithaca College
- Joliet Junior College
- Lamar University
- Lone Star Community College System
- Miami University of Ohio

- Minnesota State University Moorhead
- Northland Community College
- Santa Fe College
- Texas A & M University
- University of Arkansas-Fayetteville
- University of Arkansas-Little Rock
- University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
- University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
- Waubonsee Community College

FUTURE TOOL DEVELOPMENT
QIAT-PS is currently developing a set of student quality indicators for assistive technology with an accompanying Student Self-Evaluation Matrix tool for students to rate themselves on their AT skills. The tool will be useful to both students struggling to manage AT in

higher education settings and for K-12 programs to assist students in enhancing self-awareness and problem solving with AT for better transition outcomes.

These tools, taken together, will offer a coordinated framework to support ongoing student use of AT after transition from the K-12 setting to post-secondary education.

We want your involvement and input! QIAT-PS is hosting listening sessions at upcoming conferences and other events. You may add your name to our email mail list http://bit.ly/QIAT-PS to be notified of collaboration sessions or become a reviewer and participate on the core team in the tool development. ■

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