



# Voices of Students with Disabilities: Experiences Self-Identifying and Self-Advocating - Six Perspectives Taken when Seeking Services

Rachel L. Blinn, MSW

Division of Health Sciences - University of Nevada, Reno

## BACKGROUND

**What is self-identification?** Admitting to oneself and/or others that you have a disability

**What is self-advocacy?** Acting to either obtain accommodations or protect your rights against discrimination on the basis of your disability

- Students with disabilities (SWD) are **less likely** than non-disabled peers to be admitted, remain enrolled, and graduate with postsecondary degrees
- To access student services proven to improve student retention and graduation rates SWD are required by Federal and University policy to "self-identify" and "self-advocate"
- These skills are developmental or exist on a continuum closely connected to disability identity development
- Therefore, many SWD may not have the skills necessary to access necessary supportive services

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

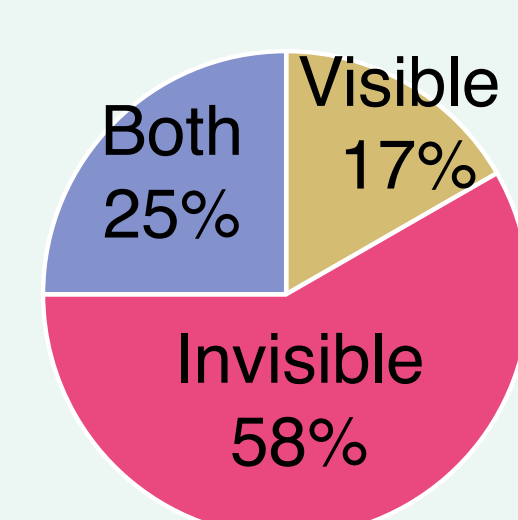
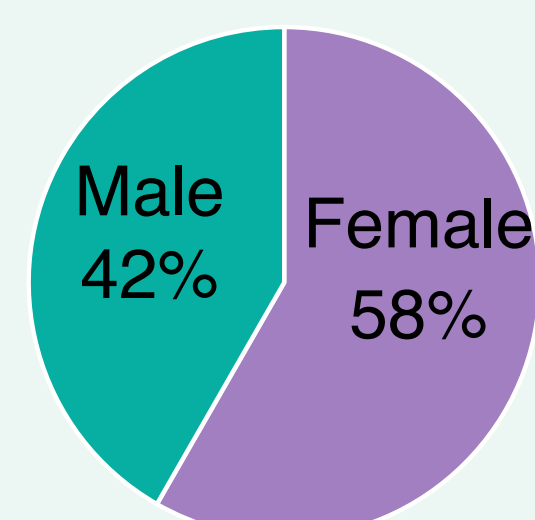
**Question #1.** How do students with disabilities at a university experience the processes of self-identifying with a disability?

**Question #2.** How do students with disabilities at a university experience the processes of self-advocacy?

**Questions #3.** What supports do students with disabilities identify as helpful for self-identification and self-advocacy?

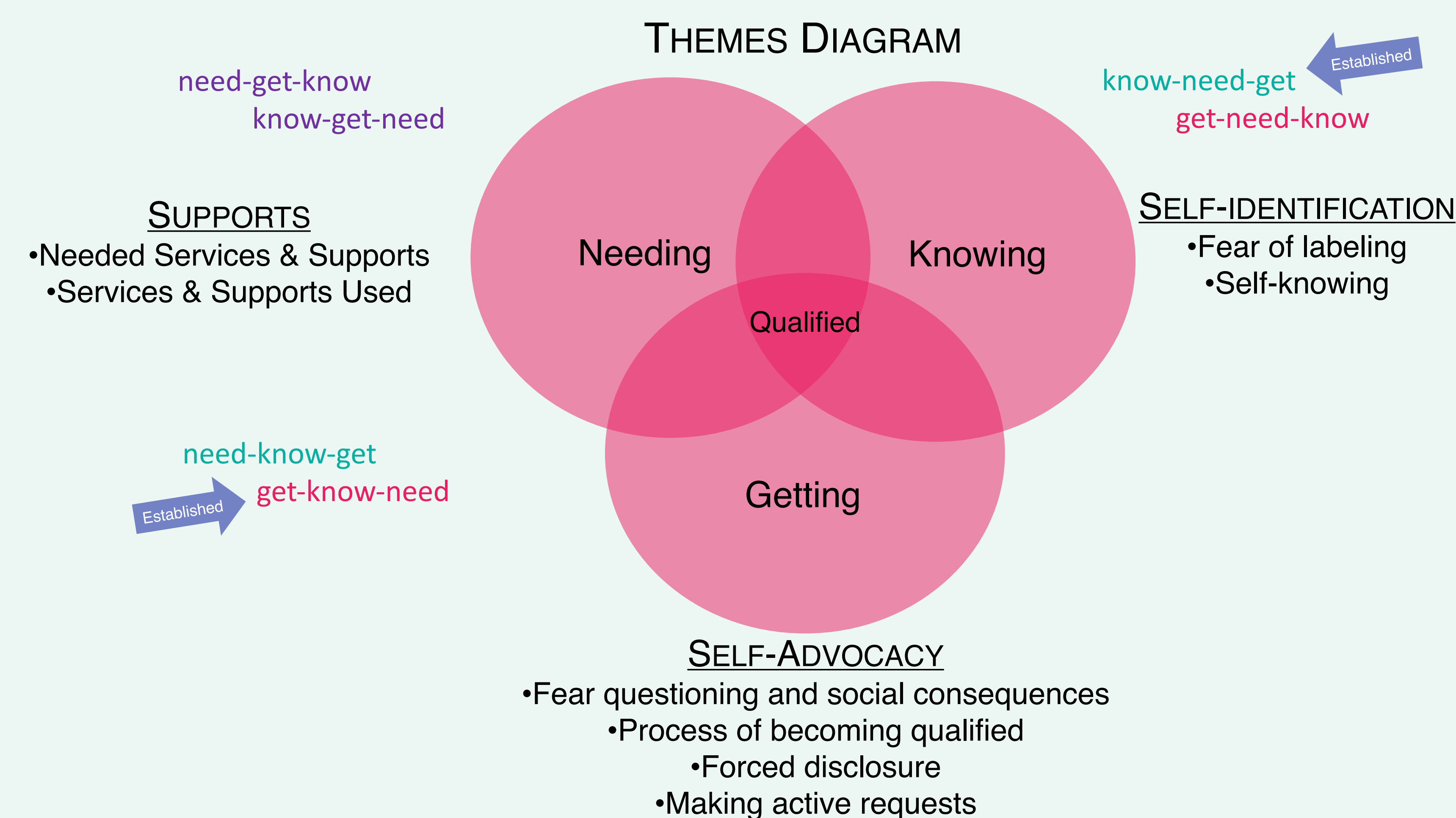
## METHODOLOGY

- Three face-to-face focus groups, each lasted approximately 90 minutes
- 12 students with disabilities
- During the Fall 2016 semester
- Same day two part study
  - Part one: Demographic data and personal reflective questions on Survey Monkey
  - Part two: Participation in a focus group discussion



## RESULTS

- Data analysis revealed three prevalent themes: needing, knowing, and getting
- Participants describe six perspectives they approached seeking supportive services
- Two of the six perspectives are well-established in self-determination literature (**know-need-get**, **get-know-need**)
- The other four perspectives require further research
- The placement of the 'get' indicated variations of participant's experiences in the process of self-identification and self-advocacy
  - If the 'get' was placed at the **end of an approach**, it indicated active self-advocacy (either from a state of knowing or needing)
  - If the 'get' was at the **beginning**, it emphasized a state of exploration (self-identification)
  - If the 'get' was placed in the **center**, it emphasized a state of contemplation
- Understanding these perspectives will help service providers better support SWD in obtaining appropriate services
- These perspective indicate areas where additional services may be provided to support student's disability identity development



### IN THE PARTICIPANT'S WORDS

#### Active Self-Advocacy

- "Knowing what you want and fighting to get that." (know-need-get)
- "I know people in the community I go above them and say, 'I need this, do it! I don't give a shit, if I need to be an asshole, 'I want this stuff, now!' You have to be.'" (need-know-get)

#### State of Exploration

- "I am not a self-advocator. I am very shy. I would like to be though. Maybe you can give tips." (get-need-know)
- "You shouldn't have to fight for every breath to get what you want once you realized what you need." (get-know-need)

#### State of Contemplation

- "I feel like you need to know about these resources [e.g. DRC]." (need-get-know)
- "An important aspect though is knowing when you need help. Not being afraid to talk to someone else for the help you need." (know-get-need)

## PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

- Although disability is a diversity, SWD are required to self-identify and self-advocate for services related to their diversity
- Service delivery providers can become aware of the various perspectives (6) that SWD may have when seeking services
- Consider the client's perspective when seeking services and how this may impact their success in requesting or obtaining services
- Listen to the language used to identify how best to support a client in self-identification and/or self-advocacy
- Listen to SWD to identify stages of disability identity development and support the logical next step in development

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