

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT: FULL TIME DSP&S COORDINATOR

QUESTION: The Chancellor's Office has been asked a number of questions lately regarding what constitutes the appropriate assignment of the DSP&S Coordinator duties at each college, and more specifically whether there is a requirement for a full-time DSP&S Coordinator.

ANSWER: Title 5 section 56048 (b) states "Each district receiving funds pursuant to this subchapter shall designate a DSPS Coordinator for each college in the district. For the purpose of this section, the Coordinator is defined as that individual who has responsibility for the day-to-day operation of DSPS. The designated Coordinator must meet the minimum qualifications for a DSPS counselor or instructor set forth in Section 53414 (a) through (d) or meet the minimum qualifications for an educational administrator set forth in Section 53420 and, in addition, have two (2) years full-time experience or the equivalent within the last four (4) years in one or more of the following fields: (1) instruction or counseling or both in a higher education program for students with disabilities; (2) administration of a program for students with disabilities in an institution of higher education; (3) teaching, counseling, or administration in secondary education, working predominately or exclusively in programs for students with disabilities; or (4) administrative or supervisory experience in industry, government, public agencies, the military, or private social welfare organizations, in which the responsibilities of the position were predominately or exclusively related to persons with disabilities."

Obviously, Title 5 does not specifically answer the questions that have been asked. Therefore, we will discuss the intent behind and the need for the DSPS Coordinator positions. As stated in Title 5, each college must have a DSPS Coordinator. This is in recognition of the specific nature and set of skills needed to deal with the variety and complexity of issues involved with providing services to students with disabilities. Specialized knowledge is needed in order for a college to comply with federal civil rights laws (such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act), state laws (such as Government Code Section 11135 and multiple sections of the Education Code), and the Title 5 regulations. Even someone who has experience as a faculty member or administrator in other areas of student services usually does not have the additional knowledge needed to assure compliance with federal and state law. In addition, they will not have the knowledge and experience needed to plan and provide accommodations and specialized assistance to students with disabilities. Over the years DSP&S services and instruction have become more, not less, complex and take a greater degree of expertise in the field than even 10 years ago.

As a general standard, although not a specific requirement, each college should have a DSP&S Coordinator with 100% of their time dedicated to the DSP&S program. When the current DSP&S funding formula was adopted in 1989-90, it included a \$50,000 base for each college. The intent of that base was to pay for a full-time DSP&S Coordinator, along with clerical assistance for each college. Since that time DSP&S has become even

more complicated to administer, strengthening the need to have a full-time DSP&S Coordinator. Some smaller colleges have had individuals identified as the DSP&S Coordinator at 50% time or even less. Some colleges have identified a higher-level administrator who covers multiple student service programs to be the DSP&S Coordinator. The most important concept to remember from the Title 5 regulations relevant to this subject is whether or not the DSP&S Coordinator can meet the responsibility “for the day-to-day operation of DSPS”. In most cases it is not feasible for someone to fully and effectively operate DSP&S without spending their entire day dedicated to those pursuits. A part-time coordinator, and especially one that is an administrator of multiple student service areas at the same time, is not achieving the goals behind the establishment of a DSP&S Coordinator at each college.

A related issue to keep in mind is maintaining the appropriate use of DSP&S funds when assigning the DSP&S Coordinator title to a position, and particularly when that assignment is made to a multi-program administrative position. A memo dated 12/1/99 was sent to all colleges by Edward O. Gould, Ed. D., Vice Chancellor for Student Services and Special Programs at the time, related to the use of categorical funds for administrative fees and indirect costs. This memo includes Title 5 Section 56068, which says that DSP&S funds cannot be used for “...administrative salaries and benefits, with the exception of the DSPS Coordinator...” The intent of this statement is to ensure that higher-level administrators not have any part of the cost of their positions covered through categorical funds. If a college assigned the DSP&S Coordinator title to an administrator covering multiple student service program areas they could possibly be in violation of Title 5 Section 56068, as well as possibly violating Section 56048, as discussed above.