College Students with LD: How SLPs Can Help

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Background

- In 2004, 7.5% of undergraduate students reported having a diagnosis of LD in the United States (NCES, 2004).

- College students with LD are at greater risk for underachievement, school dropout, and emotional impairments compared to typical college students (Denhart, 2008; Heiligenstein, Guenther, Levy, Savino, & Fulwiler, 1999; Lee, Oakland, Jackson, & Glutting, 2008; Murray et al., 2000).

- College/university faculty can play a major role in the academic achievement of students with LD and ADHD (Denhart, 2008; Houck et al, 1992; Murray, Flannery, et al., 2008).

- In their interactions with faculty, students seem to be more apt to gain faculty support and assistance when they advocate for reasonable accommodations (Murray, Flannery, et al., 2008), when they demonstrate positive attitudes (Nelson et al., 1990), and when they exhibit an effort to learn and succeed academically (Strage, 2007).

- “Disability attacking” interventions by skilled professionals, such as speech-language pathologists, can improve reading, writing, and/or organizational skills in college students with LDs and/or ADHD (Apel & Swank, 1999; Eden et al., 2004; Guyer & Sabatino, 1989).
Method

Recruitment
• 899 tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty from two campuses of a Midwestern public university were sent an email soliciting participation in an anonymous, web-based, survey study conducted between October 2009 and January 2010.

Participants
• A total of 262 faculty members completed the survey questionnaire – a 29 percent response rate.

• After 12 were excluded for substantial missing data, the 250 respondents remained.

Survey Questionnaire
• A total of 21 items; an estimated 15-20 minutes to complete.

• Demographic questions (i.e., gender, faculty rank, age, and number of years teaching)

• Likert-scale questions about faculty knowledge, experiences, beliefs, and attitudes related to college students with LD and/or ADHD

• Questions concerning their roles and responsibilities in helping this population of students and under what circumstances they might be more or less supportive of these students.

Data Analyses
• Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and cross tabulations.
Description of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
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<td>Age (in years) (N=229)</td>
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<td># Years Teaching at the University Level (N=246)</td>
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<td>10.1 (9.7)</td>
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Note. Not all of the participants responded to all of the questions.
Results and Discussion

Research Question #1:
• What are faculty members’ attitudes and beliefs about the extent to which college students with LD can be academically successful?

Answer:
• For the most part, university faculty believe that students with LD (and reading, writing, and/or organizational difficulties) can be academically successful at the college level.

• The vast majority felt students with LD could be successful all of most of the time; however, beliefs were less positive for students with reading, writing, and/or organizational difficulties.
• Less than half felt students with LD could be successful with accommodations only; yet, the vast majority (87%) felt that students with LD could be successful when provided with both accommodations and interventions.
Graphs of Faculty Beliefs

Faculty Beliefs about Academic Success for Students with Disabilities and Academic Difficulties

Faculty Beliefs about Impact of Accommodations and Intervention on Student Success
Results and Discussion

Research Question #2:
• To what extent do faculty feel responsible for helping college students with LD meet with success?

Answer:
• For the most part, faculty are willing to help college students meet with academic success.
  • 93% reported at least a moderate sense of responsibility; responsibility did not vary by perceived competence.

Research Question #3:
• To what extent are faculty willing to provide different types of accommodations to college students with LD?

Answer:
• For the most part, faculty are willing to provide reasonable accommodations for college students with LD.
  • 84% reported an overall willingness to help these students either All or Most of the Time.
  • Overall, faculty were more willing to provide accommodations that either required little effort and/or seemed fair (e.g., “Additional time for exams”).
  • Faculty were less willing to provide accommodations that seemed to require more work (e.g., “Offer oral exam in place of written exams”) or seemed to lower expectations for students (e.g., “Grade students on a different curve”).
• **Research Question #4:** What college-student behaviors are perceived as effortful by faculty? Are certain efforts made by college students with LD more likely to lead to faculty support?

• **Answer:**
  - Faculty are more likely to view students with LD more favorably when
    - these students make efforts to improve their academic outcomes via
    - engagement in specialized interventions.
  - The majority of faculty rated all of the student behaviors as exhibiting some level of academic effort.
  - Participants rated *Seeking Reading, Writing, and/or Organizational Intervention from a LD Specialist on a Consistent Basis* as demonstrating the most academic effort
  - (74% rated this as *High Academic Effort*).
  - This behavior was closely followed by, *Seeking Assistance through University Writing Center/Study Skills Center*, for which 63% of faculty rated it as a demonstration of
  - *High Academic Effort*.
  - Approximately 86% of the participants indicated that they would
    - *Very Likely* or *Likely* to help students with LD who were receiving
    - reading, writing, and/or organizational intervention from a specialist.
Implications for SLPs

• For those in university settings (as well as in hospitals and private practices) –

  • Make assessment and treatment services known to and available for college students and those who might refer them (e.g., faculty, staff, DSS providers).

  • Build working relationships with personnel in offices of disability services to assist with referrals as well as to educate them about what you can offer.

    • Many are willing to accept diagnoses of oral and written language disorders for legal access to accommodations.
Implications for SLPs

• For those in school settings –

  • Communicate with members of SLP departments in local or nearby colleges/universities for the purposes of helping high school students with language disorders better select and transition into college settings

  • Communicate with parents of students on caseloads about possible assessment and treatment services available through SLP departments in college/university settings
Implications for SLPs

• Share findings from this study with college-student clients so that they may improve their chances for academic success

• Alert them to the findings that faculty are generally positive and willing to help college students with LD (and possibly language disorders) meet with academic success.

• Let them know that disclosure of a diagnosis may prove to be more valued by faculty than disclosure of ‘difficulties’.

• Help them in learning how best to advocate for themselves; including seeking access to accommodations through offices of disability services.

• Help them to understand which accommodations would be considered reasonable vs. unreasonable and guide them in how best to ask for these in pragmatically appropriate ways.

• Help them to understand that disclosure of and engagement in effortful behaviors (including language therapy) might increase their chances for more positive relationships with faculty and academic success overall.
Future Directions

• Collect data and report on college students struggling with oral and/or written language to demonstrate the prevalence of language disorders in this population.

• Conduct and report findings from intervention studies with college students with oral and/or written language disorders in order to add support for the value of these services for this population.

• Future studies might include evaluating outcomes in college students with LD and oral/written language disorders (as well as their faculty) who are using these findings in efforts to develop positive relationships and improve academic success.
References


