Chapter 20
Marginality and Mattering:
The Experiences of Students With Learning Disabilities on the College Campus

Wanda Hadley
Western Michigan University, USA

Jennifer Hsu
Grand Valley State University, USA

Mark Antony Addison
Western Michigan University, USA

Donna Talbot
Western Michigan University, USA

ABSTRACT

Students with learning disabilities are the fastest growing at-risk population transitioning to higher education institutions. This chapter explores the academic adjustment issues students with learning disabilities experience in their transition to the college environment. Their experiences are explored and reported through the context of student development theory of marginalization. The chapter discusses students' access and adjustment to the campus culture and how this experience influences their identity development.

INTRODUCTION

There is an increase in students with learning disabilities' enrollment in colleges and universities in the United States (Agarwal, Calvo, & Kumar, 2014; Grant, 2011; Herbert et al., 2014; Hollins & Foley, 2013). A student with a learning disability is defined as having one or more of the following conditions: "a specific learning disability, a visual handicap, hard of hearing, deafness, a speech disability, an orthopedic handicap, or a health impairment" (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Learning disabilities are

intrinsic to the student and may continue throughout their life span. Even though students with learning disabilities continually enroll in colleges and universities, they generally have trouble successfully assimilating in the college environment, persevering and graduating. Students with learning disabilities might meet general university admissions requirements and many colleges and universities do provide a number of services to support their persistence. However, this population will still possibly experience a variety of academic and social challenges while in the college culture. In addition to diagnosed learning disabilities, students' transition might be challenging because they move from the structured high school environment to the more autonomous environment of college.

Once the student enrolls in the university and their disability is documented, the higher education institution is required by law to reasonably accommodate the student and provide academic accommodations. Examples of academic accommodations in the college environment include, but are not limited to, extended time for exams, tape recording lectures, note takers, or sign language interpreters. However, higher education institutions are not required to provide accommodations that are unduly burdensome, nor are they required to "fundamentally alter" academic programs (Geier & Hadley, 2015). Students with learning disabilities transition to college from a high school background that provides a tremendous amount of oversight and support due to their learning disability (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Whereas learning to manage the disability is the first concern, a primary skill for students with learning disabilities to acquire during their developmental years is to learn how to advocate for their own education. Many of these students enter college with no experience self-advocating. By contrast to their high school experience, in their transition to college, they are expected to self-advocate and practice self-determined behavior. Students with learning disabilities associate the skill of self-advocacy to better understanding their disabilities, more confidence and better able to set goals for themselves. But previous to their college experience they may have little or no experience practicing such behavior. Without the expectation of advocating for services in high school, students with learning disabilities enter college lacking such skills.

SELF-ADVOCACY AND SELF-DETERMINATION SKILLS

Students who practice both self-advocacy and self-determination are stronger at requesting services and supports on campus (Finn, Getzel, & McManus, 2008). Ankeny and Lehman (2011) defined self-advocacy and self-determination as constructs that relate to the student's understanding of their learning disability, their ability to value themselves despite their learning disability and their willingness to set forth and act on plans for their future. Self-advocacy and self-determination might be complex skillsets to develop because along with the student's learning disability, students may have other diagnosis such as attention-deficit-disorders, depression, emotional problems and/or anxiety disorders (Anctil, Ishikawa & Scott, 2008). Ankeny and Lehman further noted the significance of students with learning disabilities growing their self-knowledge about how their disability may impact their learning. They stressed that students need continuing opportunities to develop self-knowledge, including an understanding of their specific learning disability and how it influences their persistence in their college experience. Concentrating on self-advocacy and self-determination skills as students with learning disabilities transition from high school to college is necessary. Encouraging students with learning disabilities to practice self-advocacy and self-determination to contend with university obstacles can increase student retention and persistence in the college setting (Hadley, 2009). An important feature of self-advocacy and self-determination is self-awareness or "knowing yourself." Because students with learning disabilities are

Related Content

Incarcerated Students, the Technological Divide and the Challenges in Tertiary Education Delivery
Lorna Barrow, Trudy Ambler, Matthew Baileyand Andrew McKinnon (2019). *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversities in Education (pp. 17-34).*
www.irma-international.org/article/incarcerated-students-the-technological-divide-and-the-challenges-in-tertiary-education-delivery/216371

Managing Gender and Sexual Diversity in the Workplace
Rauna Keshemunhu Haitembu (2024). *Leadership Strategies for Effective Diversity Management (pp. 172-192).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/managing-gender-and-sexual-diversity-in-the-workplace/336246

Equitable and Inclusive (Classroom-Based) Foreign Language Assessment Using Universal Design for Learning
Karin Vogt (2022). *Handbook of Research on Policies and Practices for Assessing Inclusive Teaching and Learning (pp. 117-136).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/equitable-and-inclusive-classroom-based-foreign-language-assessment-using-universal-design-for-learning/294227

Socioeconomic Status and Emergent Primary Literacy and Numeracy Among Bangladeshi Children: Parental Investment Model vs. Educational Involvement Model
Emaj Uddin (2025). *Diversity and Inclusion in Global Business and Education (pp. 405-434).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/socioeconomic-status-and-emergent-primary-literacy-and-numeracy-among-bangladeshi-children/368443

AnimoSpace LMS Transcending Physical Learning Barriers
Rozanne Tuesday Gonzales Floresand Ethel C. Ong (2023). *Handbook of Research on Advancing Equity and Inclusion Through Educational Technology (pp. 239-262).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/animospace-lms-transcending-physical-learning-barriers/328564