Academic Performance and Disability:

Challenges and facilitators
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• Approximately 11% of all undergraduates report a disability
  - U.S. Department of Education, 2006

• Students with a disability lag behind academically

• Most research on academic performance focuses on Learning Disabilities
Academic or Cognitive Factors

- Students with disabilities, in general, fare poorly compared with their non-disabled peers
  - Present unique problems which adversely affect academic performance, which include level of intellectual functioning, as well as performance in reading, math, and writing (Hughes & Smith, 1990).
  - Those with disabilities who first enrolled in postsecondary education were more likely to have attributes associated with lower rates of persistence and degree attainment (NCES, 1999).
  - Lower GPA, SAT scores, high dropout rates, and higher absenteeism (National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, 2006)

- Students with and without disabilities, including learning disabilities, had virtually identical grades and graduation outcomes. However, students with disabilities undertook lighter course loads and took approximately one semester longer to graduate (Jorgensen, et al., 2005).
Affective Factors

- **Life satisfaction**
  - D/HH group reported lower mean scores on most MSLSS domains than the combined non-D/HH group (Gilman, Easterbrook, & Frey, 2004)

- **Self-esteem**
  - Students with learning disabilities reported significantly lower scores on several domains of self-esteem, including general intellectual competence and global self-worth, compared to their peers without disabilities in a public school
  - Support from parents predicted 35% of the variance in global self-worth. Support from classmates, close friends, and teachers did not make significantly unique contributions to self-worth above and beyond support from parents (LaBarbera, 2008)
FOUND WHAT? STATE THE RESULT CLEARLY

yuxiawang, 1/26/2010
Affective Factors Cont.

- Perceived control of the impact of the disability
  - The more participants viewed their learning disability as not modifiable, global, or stigmatizing, the more likely they were to give up.
  - The more participants felt they could modify the influence of disability, the more likely they were to invest renewed effort in self-help.
  - The students who felt their learning disability was stigmatizing were less likely to seek help (Hoehn, 1999)

- Perceived social support
  - Perceived social support mediated the relationships between personality factors and college adjustment (highlight perceived social support as a point of intervention to improve college adjustment) (Lidy & Kahn, 2006)

- Students with LD reported needing more support from friends and campus organization than nondisabled students (Ryan, Nolan Keim & Madsen, 1999)
Behavioral Factors

- Reluctant to seek help (use of accommodations)
  - Less than 50% of students identified as deaf or hard of hearing accessed a support service
  - Of those who did, 47% completed their degree versus 37% who did not access the service
  - A higher proportion of those who did not access the service had deferred or withdrawn from their studies compared with those who did (Hyde, Punch, Power, Hartley, Neale, & Brennan, 2009)
  - Students who frequented a disability support services office on campus benefited academically (Getzel, McManus, & Briel, 2004)
Limitation of Previous Studies

- Most of the studies focus on learning disabilities
- Some studies only involve small sample size
- Some studies with large and representative sample were conducted in other countries
• In the current study we explore:
  • Participants reporting different types of disabilities
    • Psychological disabilities, e.g. major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia
    • Cognitive disabilities, i.e. learning disability, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
    • Physical disabilities, e.g. impaired movement
  • How they compared with participants reporting ‘no disability’
• We compared the types on:
  • Their academic status over 4 semesters
  • Whether they registered with Disability Support Service (DSS)
  • The relationship DSS registration with academic status
  • Psychological profile
• We designed the study using
  • Tinto’s Student Integration Model (1975, 1993)
  • Social and academic integration is related to retention
    • Effective retention programs are committed to the development of supportive social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members.
• Method
  – Participants
    • Census incoming students
    • 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09
    • Total number was 9090
    • Equal number male and female students
    • African American from 11-14%
    • Asian American from 12 to 14%
    • Latino/a from 4 to 7%
    • Caucasians from 58 to 68%
• Procedure
  • Tracked academic performance in 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th semester, by disability type

• Academic performance:
  • Registered for classes and in good standing
  • Registered for classes and on academic probation
  • Registered for classes and dismissed
  • Not registered for classes (including cancellation and withdrawal)
• Also,

• Registration with Disability Support Services, by disability type and

• Its relationship with good academic standing, i.e.

  • Registered as a student and not on academic probation
Finally,

Psychological health, by disability type
- Life satisfaction
- Self-esteem
- Perception of obstacles
- Support from family and friends
- Attitudes towards help-seeking
Measures

– Life Satisfaction was measured by the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985)
  • ‘If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing’

– Self-esteem was measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES) (Rosenberg, 1965)
  • ‘I am able to do things as well as most people’

– Perception of obstacles was measured by the Constraints Perception Scale (CPS) (Lachman & Weaver, 1998)
  • ‘There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life’
• Support from family and friends was measured by the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, Farley, 1988)
  • ‘My family really tries to help me’
  • ‘I can talk about my problems with my friends’

• Attitudes towards seeking psychological help (Fischer & Farina, 1995)
  • ‘I might want to have psychological counseling in the future’
Results

- Increase in participants with a psychological disability from .8% (0506) to 3% (0809)
- Female participants consistently more often reported psychological disabilities (from 58% to 68%) than male participants (32% to 42%)
- Male participants more often than female participants reported cognitive disabilities (49% to 80% v. 20% to 51%)
Academic performance

- Psychological disability:
  - More often than others did not register for classes 1st and 2nd semester
Academic performance_cont.

- Cognitive disability:
  - More often than others at the end of the 1st semester on academic probation
  - More often than others at the end of the 4th semester did not register for classes.
Academic performance_cont

- Physical disability:
  - More often did not register for classes at 4\textsuperscript{th} semester
Registration at the university Disability Support Services (DSS)

- Participants reporting a cognitive disability more often than others registered with DSS
- One percent (n=55) of those who reported ‘no disability’ at the time of the census registered with DSS
Registration with DSS and academic standing

- Overall, participants who registered with DSS tended to do better academically than those who did not. They were more often:
  - Registered as a student and
  - Not on academic probation
Registration with DSS and academic standing _cont.

- This trend was significant at the end of the 1\textsuperscript{st}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} semester for those who indicated ‘No Disability’ at the time of taking the census

- This trend was also significant at the end of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} semester for those who indicated ‘Psychological’ and ‘Cognitive’ disability at the time of taking the census
Psychological aspects by disability type

- For those with psychological disabilities *lower than all on*
  - Life satisfaction
  - Self-esteem
  - Social support family, friends
- For those with psychological disabilities *higher than all on*
  - Perception of obstacles
  - Willingness to seek help
- Significant differences between those who report a psychological disability and those who report no disability
What do we know?

- Of those reporting a disability, women more often reported a psychological disability
- Men more often reported a cognitive disability
- Those reporting a disability seem at risk academically
• Psychological disability:
  • Report relatively low mental health
  • Reluctant to register for classes initially (intimidated?)
  • Report wanting to seek help for psychological issues, but tended not to register with DSS
• Cognitive disability:
  • Register for classes initially, but are at risk academically by university action.
  • Tend not to register later semesters
  • Tend to register with DSS, suggesting they can advocate for themselves
  • More of those who register with DSS do well academically
- Physical disabilities
  - More of those who reported a physical disability did not register for classes at the 4th semester
• No disability:
  • Some registered with DSS anyway
  • Those who did, performed better academically 3 out of 4 semesters
Using Tinto’s Integration Theory, what should we advise students in terms of

- **Academics**
  - Orientation: bridging the gap to college—provide requirement of the academic system
  - Pre-entry assessment and placement: identifying student needs—placing students in appropriate first year course
  - First year: making the transition to college—helping students make the academic transition

- **DSS registration**
  - Orientation: bridging the gap to college—provide with info about the character of institution
  - Pre-entry assessment and placement: identifying student needs—assessing students for counseling and advising purposes
  - First year: making the transition to college—helping students make the social transition to the new life
Case presentation

Alan is a 19 year old Caucasian male interested in being a biology and psychology major with the intention of becoming a scientist. A first year student, he enrolled in computer science class out of intellectual curiosity. After moving away from his home to attend college, Alan decided to see a therapist to address issues he had been dealing with in his life. Previously, his family’s stereotypical view on mental illness prevented him from doing so. In the past year, he has been diagnosed with and started medication for generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and dysthmia (low-level, chronic depression). While the dysthmia affects his energy levels, the OCD impacts Alan’s learning process in that if he fails to solve a problem correctly, he typically obsesses about why it does not work before moving on to attempting another way. This led to him falling behind in courses, and the pressure to meet deadlines triggered anxiety. He was also experiencing emotional stress due to a parent being called up for deployment to Middle East. Alan did not consider his psychological conditions as a disability and was thus not registered with disability services. However, because of the multiple stressors and their negative impact on his performance, he did begin seeking advice from his instructor.


References


