Disability Support Services: Examples of Best Practices for Supporting Students with LD and ADHD in the Community College Setting

Alicia Brandon (Steve Fadden), Landmark College
Susan Trist, Western Nevada College
Sandi Patton, Lone Star College System

This material is based upon work supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (P333A050035). Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education.

Session Goals: Best Practices for Disability Support Services (DSS)

1. Understand the role of DSS in college strategic planning and development
2. Discuss ways to effectively support academic success for students who struggle
3. Learn about innovative approaches to supporting students in transition
4. Review options for providing staff and faculty development
5. Be exposed to meaningful ways to support "success" as identified by students who struggle

Partnership to Support Students with LD

• Based on grant from U.S. Department of Education: "A Needs-Based Best Practices Professional Development Program for Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities in the Community College Setting"
  - Goals include development and evaluation of resources for community college faculty, staff, and service providers to promote success for students with LD/ADHD
  - Partners have co-developed a professional development module on Best Practices for DSS to support students with LD/ADHD
    • Community College of Allegheny County
    • Community College of Vermont
    • Houston Community College System
    • Lone Star College System
    • Western Nevada College
Best Practice 1: Support & Inform Strategic Planning

- Shared mission statement and goals
- Crisis Management Team to address academic and nonacademic issues/concerns
- Community outreach to identify student outcomes, college goals
- Advisory Board

Why Do Strategic Planning?

- Ties your program into your institution’s strategic plan, giving it legitimacy
- Provides a strong justification for budget and staffing requests
- Documents accountability
- Gives you and your staff a road map to help you get to where you want you and your program to be

Critical Resources to Consider

- Your institution’s formal Strategic Plan
- Community statistics
  - Local school districts
  - State vocational rehabilitation
- Collaborative partners
- Retreat, with facilitated planning
- Plan big
- Remember that it is a Living Document
Critical Team Members

• Council on Disability Services
• Advisory Committee
• Individuals with disabilities
• Administrative support
• IT inclusion
• Facilitator
• Writing team

Strategies for Effective Utilization

• Tie YOUR goals to your institution’s Strategic Plan goals
• Include measurable objectives
• Get administrative “stamp of approval”
• Share your document
• Update your document annually
• Keep it a “Living Document”

Benefits and Uses

• Develops consensus among collaborating partners
• Provides supporting documentation for other initiatives
• Demonstrates measurable accountability
• Functions as a strong justification tool in budget negotiations (directly supports institution’s strategic initiatives)
Best Practice 2: Provide Academic Support

• Universal Design approaches
• Learning and resource centers
• Tutorial services
• Assistive Technology (AT) and technology-mediated education
• Consulting services: Learning profiles and recommended strategies
• Learning communities
• Flexible models of advising

Best Practice 2: Provide Academic Support (Technology)

• Technology can help promote access to education for all students
• Potential benefits
  – Content persists and can be reviewed over time
  – Information can be designed for multiple modes of interaction
  – Students “look” the same
  – Thoughts can be planned and communicated more clearly
  – Students may express themselves more
• Potential costs
  – Technology requires planning and discipline
  – Instructors need to be skilled in both technology and pedagogy
  – Easy to design poorly (“exploding PowerPoints”)
  – Technology problems may detract from educational benefits
  – Temptation to go off-task (check email, instant message, explore web)
  – Lack of social cues, facial expressions, verbal comments

Promote Technology Preparedness

• Resources and personnel must be available
  – Support development of technology skills
  – Troubleshoot hardware and software problems
• Instructors need to be prepared
  – Pedagogically-grounded approaches to technology-mediated instruction
  – Effective design of materials for broad range of students
  – Appropriate use of technology functions
• Develop rules for interaction
  – Similar to physical classroom management
  – Public versus private communication
  – Expected frequency and quality of participation
  – When to chat, use email, or follow-up in person
Implement AT to Support Learning

- Legal concept: AT is any item, piece of equipment, or system that helps people bypass, work around, or compensate for learning difficulties.

- Landmark College approach: AT is used to facilitate academic performance, rather than bypass skills and strategy development.

Common types of AT software

- Concept mapping software to quickly capture and visually organize information.
- Speech recognition systems to convert spoken words into digital text and information.
- Text-to-speech software to convert text to audible information.
- Reading systems to convert text to speech and promote elaboration and processing of written information.
Common types of AT software

- Annotation and commenting systems to track and view changes over time
- Electronic organizers to track and remind users of tasks and sequences

Evaluate Usability of Instructional Content

- Used to validate profiles and identify design requirements
- Can see the strengths and limitations of content with technology
- Students can review their own information to promote metacognitive awareness
- Reveals issues that students and instructors may not be aware of

Evaluate Effort to Access Information

The War of the Worlds by H.G. Wells, 1898
Chapter Fourteen, “In London”
Compare this eye movement pattern…

…with this eye movement pattern

Common Problems with Technology

- Inaccessible and unusable ancillaries and resources
- Inefficient and ineffective use of technology
- Inconsistent information layout and gratuitous design
- Dominance of text-based delivery
- Inflexible error handling
- Lack of support for AT
Best Practice 3: Support Transitions

• Offer Transitions/Bridge Courses
  – Transitions noncredit college class
  – Summer programs targeting high schools
  – 8-week 1-credit transitions course
  – 3-credit summer program offering
  – Dual-credit course
  – Required first semester experience 3 credit course
  – Mental health agencies & employee/student referrals

Best Practice 3: Support Transitions

• College Connection Experience
  – NH College Connection Day
  – College Star Day Conference
  – College Fair Day
  – Attend exit IEP meetings
  – Peer Mentoring

• Accessible and flexible process for documentation intake
  – Phone intake
  – Private Fax line intake
  – Release forms from diagnosing doctor
  – Provide initial temporary accommodations

Best Practice 3: Support Transitions

• Collaborate with Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)
  – Offer transition courses funded by OVR
  – Work with OVR to identify students needing documentation
  – Provide a counselor from OVR on each campus site

• Orientation
  – Introduction to DSS in classes, in opening orientation sessions, in evening seminars
Best Practice 3: Support Transitions (Peer Mentoring at Western Nevada College)

Peer Mentoring History

- Campus wide effort to increase retention and improve student success
- Peer mentoring identified as a “best practice”

...and Framework

- Faculty sponsors indicated interest and developed programs specific to area
- Faculty sponsors selected peer mentors
- Peer mentors paid well to attract quality students as mentors

How DSS Students Use Mentors

1. Tutoring in course material
2. Personal support and encouragement
3. Setting and accomplishing goals
4. Study skills & time management
5. Referral to campus resources
Did you know….

• Mentoring makes students feel more connected to people and the college.

• Students who met with peer mentors report increased self-motivation, increased understanding of material, and improved study skills.

Student Success

• The peer mentor program increases student success through improved:
  – understanding of course material
  – study skills
  – time management

• The peer mentor program also enhances student community development.

Fall 2007 Peer Mentoring Programs

• 14 Peer mentoring programs employed 27 peer mentors
  – ASL
  – Nursing
  – DSS
  – English 101-web
  – Math
How Effective Is The Program

• Each project compared mentored vs. non-mentored students

• Fall 2007 data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Headcount/unduplicated</th>
<th>%pass/&quot;C&quot; or better</th>
<th>% &quot;W&quot;</th>
<th>% retained to Sp 08</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentored</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-mentored</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Comments

• "The knowledge that was shared with me was outstanding. With these services, my grade would not have been as decent. Thank you so very much."

• "I really enjoyed this experience and would like to see it continue."

"I am a returning student and found peer mentoring very welcome. I wish it was available in the 1980’s when I first started school!"

"I think that…having someone who is also in college and has taken the course really helps because they can relate."
Student Comments

- The peer mentor...
  - "gave good advice on how to study for tests and told me what was important when note taking."
  - "helped me to study for tests and quizzes."

Why Students Mentor

- "It is a wonderful program that provides an important service."
- "I enjoy the learning environment and helping people acquire new knowledge."
- "[Mentoring is] helpful and supportive for students."
- "To help others and motivate students to do well in school."

Best Practice 4: Support Staff Development

- Build professional development requirements into rank & promotion criteria, salary contract agreements
- Set DSS Office goals to increase awareness campus-wide
- Work with faculty & staff training centers that offer ongoing training and professional development
- Participate on faculty and staff professional development committees
Best Practice 4: Support Staff Development

• Collaborate with Perkins funding opportunities
• Provide a hardcopy and online handbook of best practices for faculty and staff
• Early each semester, send letter of DSS introduction to faculty and staff
• Hold a district-wide Annual Disability Conference Day
• Create multiple-day Summer Institute workshops
• Offer in-person and distance education training (online, podcast, webinars, etc.)
• Lone Star College System and Expanding Horizons Conference and regional institute model

Best Practice 5: Foster Student Success

• Understand and promote success-related factors
  – Support student self-advocacy training and development
  – Promote destigmatization and reframing
  – Provide parent education

Promote Understanding of Success-related Factors

• Studies of success for adults with LD have examined success across a number of domains
  – Employment
  – Crime/substance abuse
  – Education
  – Independence
  – Family relations
  – Life satisfaction
  – Social relationships
  – Psychological health

• Six common attributes of “successful behaviors” emerge
  – Self awareness/self acceptance
  – Proactiveness
  – Perseverance
  – Emotional stability
  – Appropriate goal setting
  – Use of effective social support systems

Factors that Inhibit Success

- Limited knowledge of:
  - accommodations & disability rights
  - nature of disability
  - problem-solving & communication skills

- Subjected to:
  - institutional resistance towards providing accommodations
  - social marginalization & stigma of minority group
  - loss of control & responsibility
  - low/poor instructor expectations

Factors that Promote Success

- Encourage a positive and proactive outlook
  - Feelings of control over goals and circumstances
  - Proactive internal decision-making
  - Cultivating an internal desire to succeed
  - Understanding the importance of strong goal orientation
  - Rethinking LD into a positive, productive experience
  - Need for effective external manifestations
  - Creating systems to promote persistence
  - Ensuring goodness of fit between abilities and environment
  - Using creativity to cope with setbacks
  - Establishing a supportive social ecology

Factors that Promote Success

- Opportunities for:
  - counseling
  - recognizing own accomplishments
  - strategy & skill development
  - developing an individual plan incorporating metacognition & executive functions

- Ability to:
  - persist with realistic goals
  - understand demands of different learning situations
  - seek help & self-motivate
  - acknowledge & accept disability
  - understand & plan regarding future academic barriers, reasonable accommodations, rights & responsibilities

References:

Understanding the Self-advocacy Scale

Connection Between Advocacy and Understanding

**Self Understanding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poorly developed</th>
<th>Well developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Frustrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low self-esteem</td>
<td>Not accessing resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inaccurate estimation of skills</td>
<td>Does not ask for help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not ask for help</td>
<td>Disorganized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorganized</td>
<td>Poor grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annoys others</td>
<td>Successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>Self-actualized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externalizes</td>
<td>Asks for help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks for help too much</td>
<td>Good interpersonal skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organized</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Self-advocacy and Legal Understanding

1. Promote Knowledge of the Legal Rights of Individuals with Disabilities
   - Educate
     - Circulate one-page overviews of Section 504 and the ADA
     - Assess knowledge of disability laws
     - Discuss the roles and responsibilities of student learning in higher education
   - Inform
     - Require course syllabi to include expectations for requesting accommodations
Self-advocacy and Communication

2. Initiate and Facilitate Communication
   - Review Instructor Communication
     - Review and practice effective ways to communicate with the instructor.
   - Routinely Initiate Communication with Students
     - Ask students if they have any concerns
     - Ask students to share any warning signs
     - Note that a substantial number of individuals diagnosed with AD/HD are also diagnosed with anxiety, depression, and other co-occurring conditions
   - Provide Online Access to Course Syllabus

Self-advocacy and Self-understanding

3. Promote Self-Understanding
   - Advertise LD and AD/HD Facts
   - Brainstorm and Discuss Learning and Thinking Styles
   - Compare Learning Styles with Strategies
   - Build Student Self-Assessment Activities into Lesson Plan

Self-advocacy and Self-regulation

4. Foster Self-Regulation
   - Have Students Record Personal and Academic Goals
   - Record their personal and academic short-term (semester) and long-term (degree completion) goals
   - Distribute & Discuss Facts on Self-Regulatory Behaviors
   - Encourage Students to Keep Track of Action Items
Promoting Destigmatization and Reframing

• Students who believe that intelligence and the ability to learn can be experienced and enhanced through effort and experience over time are more likely to use strategies of:
  – effort regulation
  – managing time and study environment
  – peer learning
  – help-seeking behavior


Reduce Stigma and Demystify LD

• Educate –
  – Share information about the nature of learning disabilities. Offer courses about LD and AD/HD
  – Incorporate assignments in classes on issues of stereotyping and stigma
  – Share the positive side of LD. Invite speakers to class to share strategies

• Support Identity Development –
  – Provide support groups, mentors
  – Schedule events featuring speakers with LD and/or AD/HD

Support Reframing

• Identify & Recognize –
  – Share information about Gerber's reframing stages & characteristics
    – Recognition
    – Understanding
    – Acceptance
    – Plan of Action
  – Areas of strengths for the student
  – Areas of weakness and appropriate ways to compensate

• Define –
  – Success
  – Resiliency
Questions?

1. Understand the role of DSS in college strategic planning and development
2. Discuss ways to effectively support academic success for students who struggle
3. Learn about innovative approaches to supporting students in transition
4. Review options for providing staff and faculty development
5. Be exposed to meaningful ways to support “success” as identified by students who struggle