

How Does Involvement with SSD Impact Students' Metacognition and Self-Advocacy?

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Learning Outcomes

Students who engage in programs, activities, and services provided by Services for Students with Disabilities will [or will be able to] . . .

1. Demonstrate knowledge of University and community resources that will enable them to more fully self-advocate. (Cognitive and Practical Skills)
2. Use technology effectively to support equal access. (Cognitive and Practical Skills)
3. Articulate individual strengths, weaknesses, and compensatory strategies in order to comprehensively understand their ability and disabilities. (Personal Development)

Approach

Three SSD staff members identified two target students who met the desired criteria for this study and who consented to participate. Interview questions were initially generated by Northwestern's Assessment Analyst, who also agreed to interview the target students, and then revised with multiple SSD staff members' input. The Analyst was unaware of both students' level of involvement with SSD. Their recorded interviews were then evaluated by SSD's intern, who was also unaware of students' level of involvement with SSD. Meanwhile, information about both students was culled from their diagnostic testing reports, academic records, Financial Aid, and SSD's database (including staff notes about and emails with students).

Sample Interview Questions

1. Talk about your experiences in the classroom. What has come easy? Hard?
2. When were you first diagnosed with your disability? What prompted you, your parents, or your teachers to have you tested/diagnosed?
3. How has your understanding of your disability changed since coming to Northwestern?
4. When it comes to learning, what are your strengths? Weaknesses?
5. What accommodations are in place at Northwestern to help you be most successful academically?
6. Describe the compensatory strategies you use to help you be successful academically.
7. Describe 2-3 university resources that have been helpful to you.
8. What is your understanding of the term "self-advocate?"

Findings

1. Refer to tables for summaries of:
 - Demographic similarities (top right) between target students
 - Differing outcomes (right) for students
2. Student #2 (who was more engaged with SSD than Student #1):
 - Demonstrated better understanding of his disability
 - Articulated greater utilization of a wider variety of strategies
 - Had a higher cumulative GPA
3. Both students described SSD as their most valuable/primary Northwestern resource, but neither articulated utilizing many other campus resources.
 - Student #1 reported approaching professors and TAs more than Student #2 (who utilized mostly peers).

Next Steps/Limitations

1. Neither student was *highly* involved with SSD
 - Expand study by including one student who is more involved than Student #2 and one less involved than Student #1.
2. Unknown direction of the relationship between "outcome" measures and involvement with SSD
 - More self-aware, strategic students may be more likely to utilize SSD to a greater extent
 - No pretest/point-of-entry (freshman fall) measures.
 - Inclusion of some retrospective self-report measures, (see interview question #3), making them more susceptible to recall bias.
3. Student #2 reporting *less* utilization of professors and TAs could be viewed as:
 - A negative – decreased campus resource utilization
 - A positive – SSD (plus working with peers) provides sufficient support
 - Highlighting the constant struggle of disability service offices between comprehensively supporting students and encouraging the use of resources outside of SSD

Target Student Similarities

	Student #1 (Less Involved with SSD)	Student #2 (More Involved with SSD)
Demographics	White male from East Coast; no financial aid; parents (now retired) worked in finance; attended private schools	White male from East Coast; no financial aid; father is financial executive; mother is homemaker; attended private schools
Major	Biomedical Engineering	Chemical Engineering
Diagnosis*	ADHD – Inattentive Type	Learning Disability – Not otherwise specified
Testing Profile	IQ: 114, processing speed = lowest IQ index score: 86/18 th , Math Composite: 128, Reading rate: 15 th percentile, Reading comprehension: 75 th percentile, Reading fluency: 108	IQ: 121, processing speed = lowest IQ index score: 92/30 th , Math Composite: 132, Reading rate: 36 th percentile, Reading comprehension: 79 th percentile, Reading fluency: 104
Approved Accommodations	1.5x on exams, Reduced-distraction environment	1.5x on exams, Computer use for exams requiring writing
Other Relevant Information	Younger brother (1.5 years younger) has multiple, significant disabilities, which heavily influenced choice of major.	Took same speed-reading course junior year of high school that his father took in college. Father is Kellogg alum.
*The students' testing profiles are very similar. Clinical judgment can influence the tests administered and subsequently, the given diagnosis, which may largely explain why these two students received differing diagnoses despite similarities in their testing profiles.		

Comparative Outcomes

	Student #1 (Less Involved with SSD)	Student #2 (More Involved with SSD)
Cumulative GPA (from SES)	3.175	3.420
Self-Initiated Exam Requests (per SSD database)	12 exams coordinated by SSD; 5 exams taken in SSD Office	33 exams coordinated by SSD; 15 exams taken in SSD Office
Nature of Email Communication (from SSD staff email accounts)	4 out of 8 email chains initiated by the student; Sporadic communication regarding exam-scheduling	8/14 email chains initiated by the student; Regular communication regarding implementing accommodations & exam-scheduling
Self-Described Disability	"I'll sit in a chair, look directly at my professor and they'll think I'm paying attention the whole time, but I'm somewhere else...so it's kinda' hard to tell whether I'm paying attention."	"I definitely do things a bit slower than my peers, I need to spend more time on most subjects" "The way they measured it is through two things they test for when they do the battery of tests they do: Cognitive fluency and processing speed...was very low"
Strategies Reported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaking assignments into smaller pieces and knowing when it is necessary to complete assignments • Spending time planning out the week in order to know what needs to be done. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Assignments ahead so as not to wait until the last minute to complete assignments, • Utilizing a Google Calendar and phone reminders to keep track of events that do not occur regularly, and • Working with peers on difficult subjects to better understand material.
Strengths Reported	Could not describe well.	Good at math and at seeing the big picture on assignments.
Weaknesses Reported	Could not describe well.	Biggest weakness is working a lot slower than others, handwriting is poor.
Other Resources Reported	Professors and TAs; cited SSD as most helpful.	Peers; Cited SSD as being most helpful.
Extracurricular Activities Reported	Fraternity, Best Buddies (mentoring students with disabilities)	Fraternity, Cru (Christian Student Organization), Chemistry tutor, Social Chair of residence hall
Definition of Self-Advocate	Did not provide a definition, but described that it is more necessary in college than in high school and it is something he has been "historically bad at doing."	"Basically means that you need to speak up for whatever you need out of the situation...in college it's your job to do that because you are an adult now."