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When Fish Climb Trees: Discovering Resources for Students With Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder

Department of Education at California State University Monterey Bay

LS 400: Senior Capstone

Dr. Patty Whang

May 18, 2023

Abstract

The focus issue addressed in this Capstone Project is determining what resources are available to college students diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). This is an important issue for colleges because the right resources can make all the difference regarding the academic success of students with ADHD. An evidence based argument is offered on the necessity of appropriate resources for college students with ADHD. The primary stakeholder perspectives chosen were those of college students with ADHD, and staff members of the Counseling and Disability centers on campus because of their relevant experience and insight regarding ADHD. Three action options emerged from an analysis of the data and were explored as ways to address the issue presented: 1) Calling for reform within the disability center on campus 2) Forming a support group for students with ADHD on campus 3) Creating a study space specifically designed for students with ADHD on campus. Calling for reform within the disability department is argued to be the most effective way to assist college students with ADHD in obtaining the resources necessary for them to succeed academically.

Setting the Stage

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid. ~ Unknown

As a kid I knew from a pretty young age I was different. When I was seven, my mom would spend hours attempting to teach me how to read. It was painful, and all I could think about was how much I wanted to jump up off my seat and run outside to play. This difficulty with my studies and lack of both focus and motivation did not stop there, and I quickly began to fall

behind in all of my subjects. Although I was a perfectionist and thus often produced good work, none of it was ever completed by the deadline. On top of the challenges I was already having with school, my household lacked structure and routine. This may not have been such a severe hindrance had I not been homeschooled. Unfortunately, my environment, coupled with how my brain worked, ended up being a deadly combination. By the time I graduated high school, my self worth had plummeted, and I was in a constant battle with depression and anxiety. In spite of these challenges, I decided to start attending community college. I figured even if I got bad grades, at the end of the day I could still earn a degree.

At first, attending community college was somewhat of an academic relief. Factors such as grades being attached to a GPA, and the opportunity to earn my teachers' approval offered me enough motivation to study regularly. I was also diagnosed with a learning disability through the college, which enabled me to receive the accommodations necessary to be successful in my classes. I truly flourished in many areas my first few semesters. As much as I wanted this version of me to last, it could not. Once the novelty of college wore off, I was right back where I had started. The need to preserve my perfect GPA and impress my teachers now came at the cost of my health, and with each semester, I became more burned out. I had few organizational skills, and thus little sense of how to plan out a schedule. My raging anxiety would override all other functions, and anything deemed unnecessary for homework completion, such as eating, sleeping, and socializing, would face daily elimination. The anxiety would eventually turn into depression, and the depression, to suicidal ideation. I did end up completing my credits and transferring to undergraduate school, but I was nothing more than a shell of a person.

To this day I still find myself fighting a constant battle against my brain's chemical makeup, an endless game of russian roulette. As I reflect on the semesters past, I honestly cannot

think of a single time when all of my homework was done and I could relax. Given the opportunity, my brain would rather watch paint dry on a wall than complete a task involving more than two steps. From the time I wake in the morning to the time I fall asleep at night I am either in a state of frantic anxiety or crippling fatigue; there is little to no in-between. Struggling through the chaos of my life has led me to think about my peers with the same diagnosis. How many struggle to get to class each day after another sleepless night of homework? How many students have been told they are gifted or brilliant, only to feel confused and destroyed when they burn out due to untreated symptoms? How many simply get overwhelmed and give up at the thought of trying to achieve something they do not think possible?

I want these students to know they are not alone, and can get the right resources to aid them in achieving their academic goals. After all, we are the creatives, the inventors, and the dreamers that truly believe we will change the world. But we cannot reach our potential alone. Yes, us fish are going to have to continue climbing trees; the least others can do is give us a boost in the process.

Literature Synthesis

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5) as a “persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development...” (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013, p. 59). According to the DSM-5, people aged seventeen and up must be exhibiting at least five symptoms of inattentiveness, hyperactivity/impulsivity, or both for 6 months to warrant an ADHD diagnosis. The symptoms should also be present before 12-years-old, occur in multiple environments, impede or negatively

impact the person socially, academically, or occupationally, and not exclusively occur due to a psychotic disorder or another mental health disorder (APA, 2013).

In spite of the many challenges that come with having this disorder, there is still a large number of students that pursue higher education. Past studies have found that students with ADHD make up 2-8% of the college population in the United States. (Eagan et al., 2017; DuPaul, Weyant, O'Dell and Varejao, 2009). But the most recent study conducted through the World Mental Health International College Student Initiative found that 27.2% of undergraduate students have ADHD (Brown et al., 2022). Although students with ADHD are consistently attending college, many struggle to carry their academics to completion. According to research conducted by Bodalski, Flory, Canu, Willcutt and Hartung (2023), "Students with ADHD take longer to finish their degrees, have lower GPAs, and have a higher likelihood of dropping out when compared to students without ADHD (Advokat et al., 2011; Barkley et al., 2008; Faraone & Biederman, 2005; Weyandt et al., 2013)" One study that began between 1979-1980 and followed participants with ADHD for 18+ years found that only 9.1% of young adults who displayed ADHD ended up graduating college compared to 60.6% of those within a control group that did not have ADHD (Barkley, Murphy, & Fischer, 2010, p. 253-254).

According to an article by Dupaul et al.(2017), "The academic difficulties experienced by college students with ADHD are presumably due not only to inattentive and/or hyperactive-impulsive symptoms, but also to a lack of adequate preparation in academic, organization, time management, and study skills (Advokat, Lane, & Lou, 2011; Blase et al., 2009; Heiligenstein, Guenther, Ljygevy, Savino, & Fulwiler, 1999; Lewandowski, Lovett, Coddington, & Gordon, 2008; Norwalk, Norvilitis, & MacLean, 2009; Reaser, Prevatt, Petscher, &

Proctor, 2007; Weyandt et al., 2013)". This collection of data raises the question; What can be done for college students with ADHD?

What Has Been Done?

ADHD Coaching

One approach to assisting the college student with ADHD is coaching. ADHD Coaching, which was born out of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a psychosocial treatment option that assists those with ADHD in developing strategies, skills, and behaviors that assist them in navigating the disorder's core impairments (Prevatt, 2016). According to Prevatt (2016), "Most coaching programs are primarily based on a CBT approach and target planning, time management, goal setting, organization, and problem solving." (p. 109). Since parents are often the people who assist their children with regulating their ADHD symptoms, it is no surprise that their absence is cause for serious function disruption when these children turn into young adults and leave for college (Prevatt, 2016; Swartz, Prevatt, & Proctor, 2005). Because of this challenge, ADHD coaching works in some ways as a replacement to help students with ADHD be successful in college (Prevatt, 2016).

The multiple studies that have been done on ADHD coaching have yielded positive results (Prevatt, 2016; Field, Parker, Sawilowsky, & Rolands, 2013; Young, 2007; Swartz, Prevatt, & Proctor, 2005). At one southeastern university, students with ADHD paid two hundred dollars to be part of an 8-week coaching program (Swartz, Prevatt, & Proctor, 2005). Initial meetings between coaches and clients were a time of explaining what to expect and relational guidelines, initiating the consent process, creating long term goals and discussing the participants' history with ADHD. It was noted that the relationships between clients and their coaches held significance regarding the outcome of the coaching program. Students and their

coaches created weekly objectives which consisted of small steps toward the goals they had created. The program ran on a system of rewards and consequences that were designed by the students in order to make them effective. According to the study, “The weekly session involved strategizing about the client’s behaviors, including discussions of obstacles, problem-solving solutions for overcoming areas of difficulty, modifying consequences, and utilizing each week’s events as a stimulus for future actions” (Swartz, Prevatt, & Proctor, 2005, p. 651). After 8 weeks, the student chosen for a case study of this program described improvement of learning strategies and study skills, indicated areas targeted for intervention needed less work now, demonstrated improvement regarding study time, and received the goal grade she had planned for.

The follow up to this study and those that have come after have all yielded results that verify ADHD coaching is in many cases beneficial and results in positive outcomes for those that participate. (Prevatt, 2016; Field, Parker, Sawilowsky, & Rolands, 2013). Although it can definitely work well for many students, coaching is most effective within certain parameters concerning those participating. Participants need to be motivated to give of their time and energy and stay committed throughout the process. It is also best if they are not struggling from a psychiatric disorder that inhibits them from participating fully, and are able to pay for at least some of the sessions themselves. The coaching should also be inclusive of psycho education on, causes of, and disability rights concerning ADHD, as well as a discussion about use of medication as an additional treatment option (Prevatt, 2016).

Medication

One resource used by college students with ADHD is medication. Medication has been shown to help improve the academics of students with ADHD (Young, 2007, Loe & Cuttino, 2008; DuPaul et al., 2012)

According to research conducted by Dupaul et al. (2012), “Lisdexamfetamine dimesylate (LDX) is associated with statistically and clinically significant improvement in the two areas that college students with ADHD are most deficient relative to their non-disordered peers: ADHD symptoms and executive functioning” (para 61). In 2008, a case study of sixteen college students diagnosed with ADHD was conducted in an attempt to understand how these students establish their identities within the context of taking medication. Some of the students surveyed mentioned that though they knew they were smart and capable outside the context of school, they also knew that taking medication was necessary for them to succeed academically. Various students also explained that they only took their medicine as needed because they didn’t feel like their authentic selves when on it. Students were divided when it came to whether they would continue medicating after college: some thought it would be necessary for them to function within their career, while others thought they could probably get by without it (Loe & Cuttino, 2008). Research by Dupaul et al. (2021) found that medicated students with ADHD tended to persist through more semesters than those not taking medication.

Stimulants are considered the go-to treatment for ADHD within the United States and from 2006 to 2016, stimulant usage doubled (Piper et al., 2018). Although medication is the first line of treatment for ADHD, very little research has been done regarding its use by diagnosed college students. In an article by Tanya Froelich (2018) on ADHD medication adherence, she states, “Of note, we must ask ourselves how much is truly known about the benefits of prescribing stimulants to college students, as research on ADHD medication efficacy in college students is extremely limited” (para 4). There is also much concern regarding the issue of stimulant misuse among college students. College students may exaggerate symptoms of ADHD in order to get prescribed stimulant medication, or have it provided by other students who have

access to it (Loe & Cuttino, 2008; Froehlich, 2018; Benson & Flory, 2017 Overall, medicating ADHD with stimulants comes with pros and cons.

College Provided Resources

Having readily available disability resources on campus has been found to be helpful in many areas for students with ADHD (Sarkis, 2008). According to research by Sarkis (2008), “College students with ADHD had significant improvement in their grades when they used accommodations...” (p. 2). Because of section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act, students with documented disabilities are allowed various accommodations to assist them in school (United States Department of Health and Services, 2006). Accommodations offered through the college can include: more time on tests, private rooms for testing, counseling services, assistive technology, tutoring, and remediation courses Sarkis, 2008; Rath & Royer, 2002). These are general accommodations for students with disabilities, but when it comes to specific accommodations for college students with ADHD, Sarkis (2008) reports:

“Recommended accommodations for the ADHD student include: Extra time on tests including standardized tests, testing in a separate and quiet location, extended time to complete assignments, receipt of instructions in writing, assistance with writing class notes, priority in class registration, and qualifying for full-time students status with a reduced course load” (p.2).

Although the accommodations within this list definitely can be beneficial for college students with ADHD, more recent research has also found CBT and group therapy to help with their self-esteem, unrealistic self-views, negative thought patterns, psychosocial competence, and emotional maturity (Shaikh, 2018; Young, 2007).

Accommodations for ADHD are helpful, but are not always utilized by students. Some of the reasons for this are lack of education about their rights and students being unable to advocate

for themselves (Lefler, Alacha, Weed, Reeble, & Garner, 2023). College students with ADHD may also have reservations about receiving accommodations because of others' perspectives of them. But according to a study on peer and professor perceptions regarding college students with ADHD requesting accommodations, the data collected suggested that they had relatively positive perceptions of the students with ADHD requesting the accommodations (Lefler, Alacha, Weed, Reeble, & Garner, 2023).

What should be done?

An in depth analysis of the data on resources for college students with ADHD revealed that there are currently different routes these students can take to obtain resources to help them manage their ADHD symptoms. Although there have been some long term studies on resources for college students with ADHD, there need to be more to better understand which accommodations best benefit these students. Colleges should receive a large amount of funding dedicated to effective resources in order to best serve their students with ADHD. Staff members working in college disability resource centers need to be educated on the research regarding resources for students with ADHD, and should be able to pass that information along to the relevant parties. Overall, colleges should take into account the research on the most effective accommodations for students with ADHD and use that research to create a learning environment conducive to these students.

Method

College students diagnosed with ADHD often struggle to balance their studies while maintaining their mental health. For this Capstone Project, I investigated how CSUMB students diagnosed with ADHD view the resources provided by the college and what they think could be done to improve them.

Context

Seashell College is a school that is somewhat lacking in the diversity of student demographics, with Latino's and whites making up 75% of the population. As far as underrepresented groups among undergraduates are concerned, underrepresented minorities make up 50%, first generation students make up 49%, and low income students make up 30% (California State University Monterey Bay, 2023a).

Participants and Participant Selection

I reached out to seven Seashell College students diagnosed or self-diagnosed with ADHD and the office coordinators from both the campus Counseling Center (CC) and the Disability Center (DC) to request interviews for my research. I interviewed six Seashell College students diagnosed with ADHD and the office coordinator from the CC. This group of participants was invited to participate because of their relevant experience with ADHD.

Brandon Brown. An 18 year old Japanese/Caucasian male. He is a freshman majoring in environmental studies. He is diagnosed with ADHD.

Greg Green. A 22 year old Caucasian male. He is a senior majoring in Molecular Biology. He is diagnosed with ADHD through the college psychiatrist.

Rachel Red. A 20 year old Mexican female. She is a junior majoring in Cinematic Arts and Technologies. She is diagnosed with ADHD.

Whitney White. A 21 year old Mexican/Latina female. She is a senior majoring in Liberal Studies and is self diagnosed with ADHD.

Patty Pink. Based on her answers regarding SDAC resources she appears to be self diagnosed with ADHD.

Bonnie Blue Based on her answers regarding SDAC resources she appears to be diagnosed with ADHD.

Researcher

As a college student with ADHD who did not receive any interventions growing up, I have firsthand experience regarding the difficulty of managing my time and resources while working to obtain my college degree. Although I can relate to my peers with ADHD in many ways, the symptoms of this disorder are diverse and vary from person to person. For example, many people who have ADHD struggle with executive function, but it is not always synonymous with the disorder. Environment, circumstances and cultural background also cultivate diversity among college students with ADHD. Given this information, it is vital that I recognize the individuality of each of my peers with ADHD as I interview them. I must not let my own experience with this disorder cause me to assume that my peers have endured the same struggles. I needed to remain open-minded so as not to influence my research in a biased form.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions for the college students with ADHD

The questions that I asked participants were:

1. What do you know about the college resources CSUMB provides for students with ADHD?
2. What do you see as the challenges with providing resources for students with ADHD; or What are you most concerned about when it comes to receiving resources associated with having ADHD?
3. What is currently being done to address the needs of CSUMB students with ADHD - and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?

4. What do you think should be done regarding college resources for CSUMB students diagnosed with ADHD?
5. What do you think are the challenges to doing something regarding college resources for CSUMB students diagnosed with ADHD?
6. What resources, if any, do you currently use that are specifically designed to assist you with navigating your ADHD?
7. What are your thoughts regarding a study space specifically designed and equipped for students with ADHD and what might that look like? (Think about this question with the perspective that you have unlimited funds and resources to design this).
8. Is there anything else that you would like to say about resources for CSUMB students diagnosed with ADHD and/or the improvement of college resources for CSUMB students diagnosed with ADHD?

After the four participant interviews, these follow up questions were added (these questions were included in the initial interviews of Whitney White and Rachel Red, but were emailed to the other four participants after their initial interviews/google form interviews):

What is your age, major, and year in school?

What are your thoughts regarding having a support group on the CSUMB campus specifically for students with ADHD? What might that look like?

After the six participant interviews, these follow up questions were added:

What is your ethnicity and gender?

Rachel Red and Whitney White were contacted through text regarding these questions, and the four other participants were contacted through email.

ADHD Interview Questions for the DC & CC

These are interview questions regarding the resources CSUMB provides for students with ADHD. Interviews are being conducted in the hope of increasing the support system for CSUMB students with ADHD. If you do not know the answer to a question, that is completely okay! I look forward to reading your responses.

1. No information that identifies you will be used for my research. Do I have your written consent to conduct this interview? If I have your consent, please print your name below.
2. What department do you work for and what is your position title?
3. What have been your experiences with ADHD?
4. What do you know about the college resources CSUMB provides for students with ADHD? What do you see as the challenges with providing resources for students with ADHD; or What are you most concerned about when it comes to receiving resources associated with having ADHD?
5. What is currently being done to address the needs of CSUMB students with ADHD- and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?
6. What do you think should be done regarding college resources for CSUMB students diagnosed with ADHD?
7. What do you think are the challenges to doing something regarding college resources for CSUMB students diagnosed with ADHD?

8. What are your thoughts regarding a study space specifically designed and equipped for students with ADHD and what might that look like? (Think about this question with the perspective that you have unlimited funds and resources to design this).

9. Is there anything else that you would like to say about resources for CSUMB students diagnosed with ADHD and/or the improvement of college resources for CSUMB students diagnosed with ADHD?

Initial email contacting the Counseling Center Coordinator:

Hello,

I don't know if you are still the coordinator at the CC (I used to work at the DC and utilized the CC at various times) but if you are, I am doing a capstone project where I am gathering information regarding the resources we have for students with ADHD on campus. I have a google form where the questions can be answered, I'm just not sure who from your department should be filling it out. I look forward to hearing from you!

Thank you

Initial email contacting the Disability Center Coordinator:

Hello,

I am a senior doing research regarding CSUMB student resources for students diagnosed with ADHD. I have attached a copy of the google form with questions regarding what resources are provided for students diagnosed with ADHD. It would be very helpful if someone from your department could fill out this google form. Please let me know if you have any questions!

Thank you

Procedure

Students with ADHD (either diagnosed or self-diagnosed) were interviewed. All interviews were done individually. When it was not possible to interview participants in person, they were invited to complete a google form with the same questions. Face-to-Face interviews ranged from one to two hours (with participant consent), and took place on the college campus in one of the library computer lab rooms. A semi-structured interview format was used for face-to-face interviews, to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting or unexpected responses. Face to face interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and took approximately an hour to complete. Google form interviews took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Initially, to find students diagnosed with ADHD, the researcher made a post on the school's news feed page to ask students if they would be interested in participating in the research:

Hello! I am completing my capstone and I am collecting data regarding CSUMB students diagnosed with ADHD and the college resources they are provided. I am currently looking for students who would be willing to complete interviews regarding their experiences with campus resources. Interviews will be taking place on the CSUMB campus, but I can accommodate those who may be remote students as well. If you are interested in participating, please message me on here, or email me (preferred) at seashellcollege.edu

Thanks!

This post was copied and pasted with minor edits on March 8th, March 17th and April 10th in an attempt to reach more students:

*** THANKS TO THOSE WHO HAVE ALREADY REACHED OUT! Reposting in the hope of getting more interviews! I would love to hear your insight; let's help CSUMB understand how they can best support their students with ADHD!***

I am completing my capstone and I am collecting data regarding CSUMB students diagnosed with ADHD and the college resources they are provided. I am currently looking for students who would be willing to complete interviews regarding their experiences with campus resources. Interviews will be taking place on the CSUMB campus, but I can accommodate those who may be remote students as well. If you are interested in participating, please message me on here, or email me (preferred) at seashellcollege.edu

Thanks!

Four students were reached this way. Patty Pink responded through direct message on the news feed page on March 5th. Bonnie Blue responded by commenting on the second post on March 9th and was direct messaged by the researcher on March 17. After attempts to schedule an in person interview failed, Patty Pink and Bonnie Blue were sent a google forms version of the interview on March 28, 2023. Bonnie answered the questions on March 28, 2023. Brandon Brown responded to the post on March 10th via email, and was scheduled to be interviewed in person on March 16 at 1:30pm. He was 15 minutes late to the interview. Greg Green responded to the post via email on March 8th and was contacted on March 9th regarding his availability for an interview. The interview was scheduled for April 4th at 1:30pm. The student was 45 minutes late. Whitney White was asked on April 11th and corresponded via text message to set the time for 3:30 pm on April 14th. I was six minutes late due to forgetting my credit cards and being unable to pay for parking. Rachel Red was asked on April 18th through a mutual acquaintance if she would be interested in being interviewed. Her contact was sent to me, and once she expressed interest, she was contacted through text message on April 18th and agreed to do the interview at 4:30pm on that date. I was 13 minutes late to the interview due to misplacing my phone. Once five interviews with students had been conducted, it was apparent that the majority

of these students knew little to nothing about the resources the school provides for students diagnosed with ADHD. Because I felt this information was important for this study, an additional interview/survey google form was created for both the CC and the DC (See “CC and DC Interview Questions” section listed above). The CC office coordinator was contacted on (and responded on) April 18, 2023. The DC office coordinator was contacted on April 19, 2023. Both department coordinators were emailed the google form on April 19, 2023. The CC office coordinator filled out the google form on April 25, 2023.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, the office coordinator from the Seashell Campus Counseling Center and college students with ADHD were interviewed to see what they think could be done in regards to resources for college students with ADHD. This is important because college students with ADHD often need extra support to succeed academically. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision-making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: feasibility, cost, and effectiveness. Having the action option be feasible is important because the stakeholders will more likely wish to participate if there is not a huge amount of effort and resources required. Evaluating the cost of a given option is important because campuses only have a certain amount of funding to work with each year, so it is necessary to figure out how to best use that funding. The effectiveness of an option is also an essential factor to understand since students with ADHD should be equipped with the most beneficial course of action for their academics and overall well being. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will

be recommended and justified.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

	Feasibility	Cost	Effectiveness
Creation of a support group for students with ADHD	High	Low	Intermediate
Reform the disability department on campus	Intermediate	High	High
Creation of a study room for students with ADHD	High	Low	Intermediate

Reforming the Disability Center on Campus

The college's disability resource center is the place where students with disabilities can receive accommodations to help them succeed academically. As students began talking about their experiences with the center, the theme of calling for reform for this center emerged.

Although the post specifically stated that I was attempting to recruit students diagnosed with ADHD, once the interviews began it was discovered that three of the six interviewees did not have formal diagnoses, and four were not in possession of the required paperwork with proof of their diagnosis. This paperwork is necessary for anyone attempting to receive accommodations through the DC. Interestingly, although Greg had been diagnosed through the colleges' psychiatrist and was receiving medication for his ADHD, the DC would not provide him with accommodations. He explained:

They said to go to an outside psychiatrist, have an appointment with one of them and have them confirm it. And I was like, how much does that usually cost? And they were like, it's usually like \$700 or something to go get the thing taken care of. And I was like, hmm, I shouldn't have to pay \$700 for you to believe me and my doctor that what we're doing is valid. What qualifications specifically does this person need to have? Because I'm going to need to see a qualification specifically that Dr. Thomas at the health center does not have before I spend \$700 to be able to put earbuds in when I take my exam to help me focus. And when they responded back to me, they basically ignored that (G. Green, personal communication, April 4, 2023).

Due to this fact, interest in the ADHD diagnostic criteria of the college DC became a focus. Because the center did not ever respond to the request for an interview, this information was not found. However, when reviewing the literature related to this issue, relevant findings did offer some explanation. According to a study on the self-reporting of ADHD, "As pointed out by the DSM-5, assigning a diagnosis does not necessarily indicate impairment or disability, and such decisions require additional information and evidence beyond the diagnostic criteria (APA,

2013)”(Johnson & Suhr, 2021, para. 4). This means that not only students who exhibit behaviors associated with ADHD may not have it, but even if they are diagnosed, this diagnosis may not be considered enough evidence that their impairment should warrant accommodations. One of the concerns healthcare professionals have with inadequate diagnoses of ADHD is that stimulant medications are often abused among college students (Froehlich, 2018; Benson & Flory, 2017). Although there is evidence that abuse of prescription medication does go on among college students, the system currently in place at Seashell College may not be the most logical in attempting to prevent it. If students are being diagnosed with ADHD without extensive testing, and thus not receiving accommodations because it is not extensive enough, it seems likely that this system would actually increase the probability of abuse of medication due to students lying about symptoms. But if the college offered appropriate testing that would warrant accommodations, these medications may be less likely to be abused.

One of the most common complaints regarding the DC was that there is a lack of outreach by the department. Some students had only recently heard about their resources through friends or peers (W. White, personal communication, April 14, 2023; R. Red, personal communication, April 18, 2023), and two mentioned they had never seen the department table at school events (R. Red, personal communication, April 14, 2023; B. Brown, personal communication, March 16, 2023). It is very important for students with ADHD to know about the accommodations provided for them by the college they attend, especially if they have already received a formal diagnosis and are thus entitled to those resources due to section 504 of the ADA (USDHS, 2006). Other complaints about the department were summarized and compiled as follows: it is understaffed, it is underfunded, there are no drop-in appointments anymore, the website is not easy to navigate, appointments are online only and testing accommodations need

to be scheduled 7 days in advance. Only one out of the six students had strictly positive things to say about the DC.

The feasibility of this option is considered intermediate because while some areas are fairly easy to improve upon, others are not. For example, increasing outreach within the DC is a much less time consuming and costly avenue to take than working with the school psychiatrist to change the diagnostic criteria required for ADHD testing. As far as cost is concerned regarding this action option, there are too many areas needing reform to keep it low. Even if the department only addressed some of the student concerns, such as hiring more staff, increasing outreach and improving their webpages, the cost acquired would already be substantial. For these reasons, the cost is considered high. Due to the evidence presented by the students with ADHD and the literature on this topic, this action option is ranked highly effective. If all the areas of weakness within the DC are addressed and reformed, students with ADHD will have a much better chance of benefiting academically and mentally from the department's resources.

ADHD Support Group

College students with ADHD often find creating structure on their own to be a struggle. Four out of the six participants listed having other people as their supportive resources for managing their ADHD. When discussing how he gets his work done, Greg stated, "My grades are so much better when I'm dating a nerdy girl, someone that really is passionate about school. My grades seem to get so much better because they'll be like, want to hang out? Did you finish your paper that's due at 11:59 tonight? Because you mentioned it a week ago"(G. Green, personal communication, April 4, 2023). Another student, Rachel Red stated, "I call people when I have to clean my room. When I have to do tasks, I'll call people and I don't ask them to do anything. Simply just be on the phone so I can clean my room or be there" (personal communication, April

18, 2023). The responses from these interviews align with the literary research done on ADHD coaching regarding having accountability to complete tasks. Some of the areas coaches assist their clients with ADHD in are task prioritization and goal setting. (Prevatt, 2016; Swartz, Prevatt, & Proctor, 2005) Not only does it appear that having the support of others assists college students with ADHD in completing tasks, but having a sense of community can also aid them in the area of mental health. According to a study on the effects of group therapy on college students with ADHD, “Findings suggest that interpersonal group therapy improves self-esteem, psychosocial competence, and emotional maturity, and should be a treatment option for college students with ADHD”(Shaikh, 2017, para 1). After interviewing the first participant, it was realized that it would be good to ask students about having a support group on campus. Because this question was added later in the study, not all participants were able to give their thoughts on the concept, but the four that did all supported it. Some of their responses were, “That would be awesome. I would love to hear from other people that have some strategies to deal with it (G. Green, personal communication, April 4, 2023),” and “It would just be nice to have so that I can feel like I'm being productive with a group of others”(W. White, personal communication, April 14, 2023). Some even offered suggestions regarding the details of a group like this such as; “It could meet every weekend, 2-5pm” (W. White, personal communication, April 14, 2023). Based on the pertaining literature on this topic, as well as the personal testimonies, the effectiveness of this action option is ranked intermediate.

When looking at the factors associated with the location of a prospective support group on campus, there are a variety of choices. Students could meet in any of the accessible rooms in the buildings, or outside in nature on the campus owned fields and grassy areas. The group for students with ADHD would only be prevented from doing this if another student or group of

students were already in the spot selected or had reserved that room/space for their own event. There do need to be students that commit to running the group. If it is created through the school club process, there are four leader positions (president, vice president, secretary and treasurer), and these members are required to attend training associated with their positions. Having a group registered as a club comes with benefits such as free room reservations for meetings, access to club funds and tabling opportunities to promote recruitment (CSUMB, 2023b). Due to these details, the feasibility of this option is high. The cost of this option is considered low as there are not material requirements. If the leaders are working on educating members of the group on ADHD, they are able to find many articles and informational resources either online or through the campus library. They may also want to plan game or craft activities, which also would only require minor costs.

ADHD Study Room

One of the definitive symptoms of ADHD is inattention, which often comes in the form of being easily distracted by things, others, or one's own thoughts. During the interviews, students were asked their thoughts on having a study space specifically designed with their ADHD symptoms in mind. The confirmation of this action as being a valid option to consider came about due to the interview responses and literature analysis on the topic. All six students interviewed, along with the counseling coordinator, were in support of this as an accommodation, and three students mentioned it should either be two rooms, or a two sided room. The idea of having two different spaces was posed because students with ADHD often have different sensory needs, so they suggested one side be specifically for more focused studying, and the other to fulfill sensory needs. Supplies suggested for this room were: flexible seating options, white boards, writing materials, headphones, sensory gadgets, computers,

spacious desks, a board with a weekly schedule, and clocks in very visible spaces. Although the research on this type of accommodation is not extensive, some studies have been published with related ideas on the topic. One study on college students and test taking found that students with ADHD may be affected by a highly distracting environment after their analysis found that five out of the six students participating accessed more test items during a test within a private room than one that was highly distracting. (Lewandowski, Martens, Clawson, & Reid, 2020). Another study found no change in test scores for college students with ADHD regardless of whether they tested in a private room or within a room with their peers (Weis & Beauchemin, 2019). Though the students that were interviewed regarding having a study room thought it was a good idea, there is a lack of literature backing this course of action, so the effectiveness of this option is considered intermediate.

Concerning the details of constructing this environment, there appear to be many rooms on campus that could accommodate a study space for students with ADHD. Some of these rooms are already equipped with computers, white boards, and flexible seating and are not used very often at this time. Therefore, feasibility regarding this action option is high because there are likely already multiple spaces available on campus for this type of study room to be created. These factors also pertain to the cost of the project. If this room is constructed with the resources already available, all that is left to provide are some sensory resources, headphones, and writing materials. Because these items are not a large expense, the cost of this option is considered low.

Recommendation.

After evaluating the three action options through analysis of the relevant literature and decided criteria, I recommend that the disability center on campus be reformed in order for it to serve students with ADHD in a more attentive and effective manner. This option is reflective of

the center's responsibility to accommodate students with documented disabilities, and it recognises these students as an important, indispensable part of the student body on campus. The sections that follow will go into detail regarding the concessions, limitations and possible negative outcomes of the action option chosen.

Concessions.

Although I have recommended calling for reform within the disability center as the needed action option, the other discarded options are not without their own strengths. The action option suggesting a support group be created for students with ADHD is a very beneficial way to assist students with finding community, accountability and education regarding resources pertaining to their diagnoses. Not only would it be fairly easy to implement, but it also would cost the school very little to run, if anything. The interviewed students' own testimonies regarding their use of assistance from others further supports this option. Concerning the option of creating a study room specifically designed to combat the symptoms of ADHD, this action offers merits of its own. Since many students with ADHD consistently deal with issues of inattention and are easily distracted, giving them a designated space in which they can have the chance to complete assignments without so many unnecessary stimuli can greatly benefit them academically. Having this space as an option not only can increase motivation to study, but could heighten their self-esteem and sense of accomplishment since they could likely get more work done and thus improve their gpa.

Limitations.

There are several limitations that emerged as a result of conducting this research. Since I did not hear back from the DC concerning the interview/survey questions discussing ADHD resources, the conclusions drawn regarding the department are only student perspective based.

Therefore, the argument presented stating the need for better resources and outreach from the DC is currently considered one sided.

Another limitation is student sample size. Although the current school statistics for 2023 state that there is a population of six-thousand, five hundred, seventy-seven students on campus, only six students gave their perspective concerning college resources for students diagnosed with ADHD.

There were also limitations present within the student interview process. Although three of the seven students expressed interest in the project and being interviewed, these students were consistently unresponsive to emails regarding setting up an interview. Because of this, two student interviews were conducted all online through a google forms document, which may have had an impact on what thoughts were shared and the length of the students' responses.

There was also not consistency regarding ADHD diagnoses. Given that three of the students interviewed were self diagnosed, the reliability of their testimonies regarding having the disorder is questionable.

Potential negative outcomes.

Although calling for reform within the disability center on campus should prove beneficial in many areas, there is still some risk associated with this option regarding the outcome. Asking for the disability center to accept the validity of the ADHD diagnoses being given by the school psychiatrist could result in the termination of receiving that diagnosis on campus. If this happened, students with an apparent unofficial ADHD diagnosis who are currently being prescribed stimulant medications through the school would not be able to receive them anymore. Since medication is considered the first line of treatment for ADHD, this could prove detrimental for students getting prescriptions through the school psychiatrist.

It is also possible that students who may wish to be tested for other disabilities, such as autism, would feel that it is discriminatory to only have testing for ADHD on campus. This might cause any effort and funding going towards creating valid testing to be stopped.

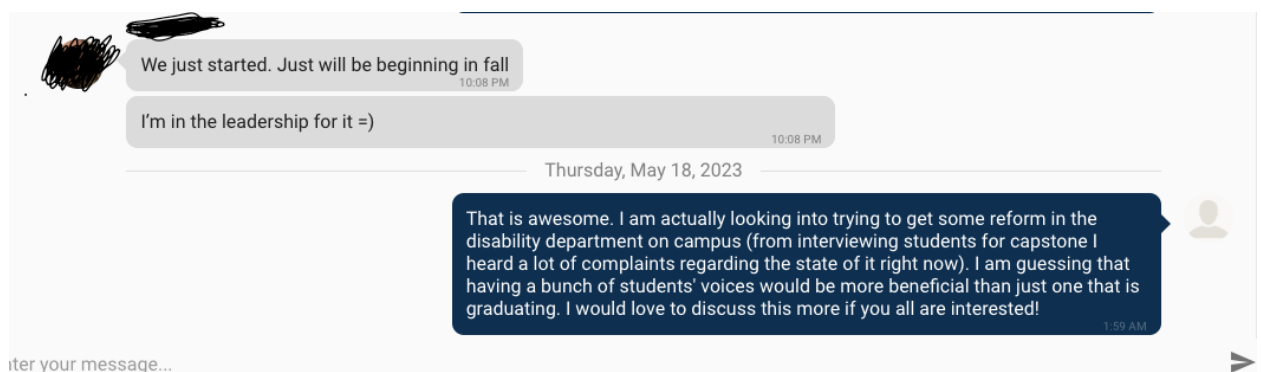
The students calling for reform could also face backlash from the disability center. Students attempting to communicate their grievances might be ignored due to the departments' current possible staffing shortage. Students' opinions about how the center should be supporting them might also be disregarded because the center simply does not want to put resources towards those areas at this time.

Conclusion. In spite of the limitations, concessions and potential negative outcomes, I recommend calling for reform within the disability center on campus as the most beneficial action option regarding the provision of resources for students with ADHD. Although the cost for this option is high, the possible effectiveness is also high. The feasibility of this option is intermediate, because some of the aspects of reform are easier to implement than others. For example, improving outreach for the center could come in the form of flyers in public spaces on campus and having an information table at school events. Unlike clubs that are student run and maintained, the disability center remains active due to paid staff and is not an aspect of the college that can become inactive due to the accommodations students with documented disabilities are entitled to. Instigating reform within the department will mean more students as a whole will hear about it and drop-in appointments will be available again, and students will be able to see their counselors face to face. The disability center is also the only place through which the students with disabilities can currently receive accommodations, so having them accept the diagnoses of ADHD provided by the school psychiatrist will give these students the best chances for academic achievement and overall well being. Due to the reasons provided, I

find that the action option of calling for reform within the disability center sits higher than the other options mentioned, and is the most effective way to assist students with ADHD in receiving resources that benefit them both academically and psychologically.

Action Documentation and Critical Reflection

The focus of this research was on resources for college students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). For this capstone I interviewed six college students with ADHD and one office coordinator from the Counseling Services on the college campus where these students attend. The action options that emerged during my research were improving the outreach and consistency of the disability center on campus, starting a student support group on campus, and creating a student study room on campus. The action option I picked was to call for reform within the disability center on campus. start a student support group on campus. Five out of the six students interviewed listed areas that are currently lacking within the center. My research of the literature also showed that the accommodations that are and can be offered through college disability resource centers are effective means of support for students with ADHD. Calling for reform could also lead to the center receiving more funding to make the changes necessary to better assist students with ADHD, along with adding new resources such as a study room specifically designed for students with ADHD.



This is the message that was sent to an officer of the new students with disabilities club on campus in an attempt to have them assist me in calling for reform within the disability center.

Critical Reflection

I learned that I am part of the 9.1% of college students with ADHD that actually graduate, yay! I also learned that I am pretty resilient considering the fact that I never had any interventions for my ADHD and am not currently on medication (which is considered the first line of treatment). It is truly amazing that I have gotten this far. As far as teaching and learning is concerned, I've learned that college students with ADHD need support in order to succeed. The college system is not set up in a way that caters to the way we function. I also learned that trying to make a beneficial change has a lot of complications, and you usually can't do it alone. There have been so many pros and cons I've had to weigh throughout this process. It seems someone always ends up getting hurt, you just have to figure out if the benefits of what you're doing will outweigh that.

Synthesis and Integration

In completing this project which is a fulfillment of MLO 4 and 5, social justice collaborator and subject matter generalist, I feel that I have a much better understanding of how to invoke change within a workplace or educational system. I know what research needs to be done, and how to protect those that may be negatively impacted by that research. I know what to look for regarding who I'm trying to get support from, and what types of tools I can use in order to reach them.

Regarding past coursework, in the spring of 2020 I took SBS 389 Environmental History of California. Although this was a history class, the focus of our readings, assignments and most of our discussions was that of social justice. During the semester, we were asked to be part of

some type of social justice project. I knew of a nonprofit organization in the area who offered equestrian therapy free of charge to local residents in the Monterey area who have disabilities. This organization offered community experience through having volunteers come and assist individuals on the horses as they were guided around the enclosed track. I had the pleasure of attending and assisting these individuals with various disabilities by stabilizing their legs and waists while they were on the horses. In the Fall 2022 semester I took LS 380 Teaching for Social Change, where we were divided into groups that focused on an advocate of social justice from American history. Using articles and other resources during class, we identified and pursued paths for social change. After thoroughly going through class materials, we engaged in reflective “practices to become ethically and socially responsible educators working toward a just and sustainable world” (CSUMB, 2023c). We learned not only how our social justice advocate used their art to change the school system, but also how other artists had an impact on and created positive social change in society.

In regards to MLO 2, Diversity and Multicultural Scholar, in both LING 392, Native Language/Language Acquisition, and LING 393 Language Power & Literacy in Education, I learned about how significant it is if people are bilingual or multilingual. I learned that teachers and the schools they work at should be making every effort to promote and preserve their students’ bilingualism. Through our readings on language, and discussions of these readings, I was able to “evaluate my own and others’ experiences as influenced by social identities, socialization practices, and societal institutions from both historical and contemporary perspectives” (CSUMB, 2023c). I also learned about diversity and multiculturalism in LS 390, Culturally Sustaining Literature. Our class was asked to investigate culturally diverse picture and chapter books, which helped us critically examine the value of diversity and multiculturalism.

Once we had done thorough walk-throughs of the given material, we were asked to write papers reflecting our understanding of the deeper meanings of this material related to culture and social justice. In doing so, I applied concepts and theories of diversity and multiculturalism.

Concerning MLO 1, Developing Educator, when I was in the LS 300 Major ProSeminar, there were a lot of discussions about how we could best serve our future students (We thought, wrote, and spoke critically). Our final within that class consisted of writing a research paper on something within the classroom that had to do with social justice. I wrote mine on the issues related to kids with disabilities and use of physical restraint within the classroom. Another class I took at the beginning of my time at CSUMB was LS 398 Social Foundations of Multicultural Literature. We learned all about different types of schools, the students within those schools, teacher salaries and the most beneficial teaching methods. Through the lectures and homework presented in this class, I learned “general knowledge, skills, dispositions, and responsibilities of a California public educator in classroom, school, community, State, and national contexts” (CSUMB, 2023c). The class was extremely helpful and brought me a lot of clarity regarding what type of school I would be interested in having my own children attend in the future.

My dream as of now is to become a counselor specializing in trauma developed in childhood. I plan to work with a company that assists at-risk youth through counseling and other resources so that I can gain experience in this field. Once I feel I have enough experience and I am financially able to do so, I will go for a masters in counseling.

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