

NAVIGATING HIGHER EDUCATION: THE IMPACT OF SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

By Lacey R. Beaman

This research sought to determine the impact of educational support systems on the success of students with diagnosed disabilities. The study included six undergraduate students enrolled at one Midwest University. Participants were also enrolled in Achieve Success - a remedial-based program for students with disabilities at the postsecondary level. Achieve Success is aimed at providing comprehensive support while fostering the development of academic independence among students with disabilities. Over the course of the study, six students participated in a series of individualized interviews with the researcher. Students were asked to share their experiences and reflect on how these experiences have impacted their abilities to become academically successful and determined in a higher education setting. The completion of individualized, semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with an opportunity to further explore the impact of previous experiences and the development and utilization of support services on the academic success of students in postsecondary education.

NAVIGATING HIGHER EDUCATION: THE IMPACT OF SUPPORT SYSTEMS
FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

by

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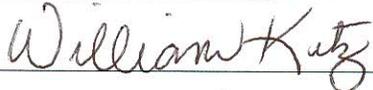
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

When entering the world of higher education, students are often faced with an increased level of academic, social, and emotional demands (Herbert et al., 2014). As explained by Field, Sarver, and Shaw (2003), “In virtually every way, success in college requires more diligence, self-control, self-evaluation, decision making, and goal setting” (p. 340). Often, students with learning disabilities (LD) enrolled in higher education struggle to meet the increasingly high academic and social demands without the assistance of a secondary education curriculum rooted in self-advocacy and self-determination development, a comprehensive postsecondary transition curriculum focused on college readiness strategies, and the availability of a comprehensive support program to ensure students’ academic, social, and emotional needs are met at the higher education level (Lombardi, Gerdes, & Murray, 2011; Troiano, Liefeld, & Trachtenberg, 2010). The provided and utilized support services become important when exploring the many predictors of academic success for students in higher education. In order to successfully navigate the world of higher education and the increasingly high academic, social, emotional, and environmental demands, it becomes important that students enter college with a developed skillset to meet these needs while also engaging in program support services that foster the development of self-advocacy and self-determination both in and outside of the classroom (DaDeppo, 2009; Harrison, Areepattamannil, & Freeman, 2012).

To ensure that *all* students have equal opportunities to succeed in a postsecondary education setting, research must be conducted to further explore how the academic, social, emotional, and interpersonal experiences of students with LDs contribute to academic achievement at this level (DaDeppo, 2009). As found by Sparks and Lovett (2013), an increasing number of postsecondary institutions offer comprehensive support programs that go above and beyond providing mandated academic accommodations. Many of these comprehensive support programs foster the development of interpersonal skill development, such as self-advocacy, self-determination, and academic independence, along with providing mandated academic accommodations (Troiano et al., 2010). Findings revealed by McDonald and Farrell (2012) concluded that skills such as “self-management, self-efficacy, motivation, and academic and social support were identified as significant in student learning and success” (p. 222). These findings support the development of college-level comprehensive, remedial support programs that provide students with the opportunity to become engaged and integrated into the college environment while further developing the necessary executive functioning, advocacy, and independence skills for high academic achievement (DaDeppo, 2009). In order to evaluate and better understand the impact of support services for students with disabilities, this research was conducted to evaluate the impact of provided curriculum instruction, support services, and informal supports on the development of determination and academic achievement.

The present study sought to further explore the impact of secondary education curriculums, postsecondary education transition support, comprehensive program support

services, and informal support systems. The researcher aimed to discover the impact of previous secondary instruction, transition support services, and postsecondary education support services on the perceived success of undergraduate college students enrolled in a comprehensive, remedial support program [Achieve Success]¹ at one Midwest University. This study utilized a narrative-based approach to examine the shared perceptions and experiences of students enrolled in Achieve Success in order to gain a stronger insight into the impact of remedial supports for students with LDs. In order to provide a strong structural foundation of research, the researcher examined if a secondary education curriculum focused on college readiness techniques, postsecondary education transition support, and the utilization of program support services that focus on the development of academic independence, self-advocacy, and self-determination determination skills led to academic achievement among college students with disabilities.

Importance of Issue

The impact of transitional and postsecondary supports on the academic success of students with LDs is noteworthy. Since previous research has revealed that students with LDs are now enrolling in higher education at the same rate of the general population, it has become increasingly pertinent that research in the field of comprehensive support services for students with LDs be evaluated (Herbert et al., 2014; Showers & Kinsman, 2017). Although enrollment among students with LDs in college has steadily increased over the years, this student population continues to experience a lower graduation rate

¹ Program name was changed to protect the identity of student participants

than their non-disabled peers (DaDeppo, 2009). In order to address the needs of *all* students, higher education institutions around the world are striving to create learning opportunities that provide students with an engaging and meaningful academic experience, while also aiding in the development of advocacy, determination, and persistence among the student population. While many higher education institutions strive to meet the academic and personal needs of all students, previous research has revealed that in order for students to academically achieve at a higher level, they must be provided with additional support services that meet their individual needs (DaDeppo, 2009). Today, the world of higher education provides students with unique learning opportunities that are embedded in skill development, collaboration, and communication, and a significant number of postsecondary institutions are also providing comprehensive support programs for students with LDs that foster the development of self-advocacy, determination, and academic independence (DaDeppo, 2009).

Although enrollment of students with LDs in higher education is on the rise, previous research has revealed that a lack of support services may result in these students experiencing a variety of academic, social, emotional, and/or environmental barriers to success in higher education (Harrison et al., 2012). As reported by Harrison et al. (2012), students with LDs “reveal that they have greater difficulty handling academic demands, adjusting to change, dealing with criticism and adjusting to university life” (p. 2). Students with LDs entering higher education may also experience a heightened level of frustration and stress when faced with conflicting barriers (Harrison et al., 2012). These noted barriers often include entering college without an understanding of personal

disabilities, lack the ability to be effective self-regulated learners, and previous lack of engagement in skill development instruction crucial to success at a higher level (Harrison et al., 2012; Nichols, Harrison, McCloskey, & Weintraub, 2002).

After the transition to college has occurred, students with LDs may continue to encounter barriers and challenges to academic success. A study conducted by Harrison et al. (2012) revealed the following:

Adults with LD also must develop a clear and accurate understanding of their own needs, strengths, and limitations, and an ability to efficiently and accurately explain their disorder and know how it affects their academic, social, and interpersonal functioning. (p. 57)

These provided findings outline the impact of transition instruction rooted in college readiness techniques and crucial skill development to better prepare students with LDs for higher education (Harrison et al., 2012). Researchers also outline the importance of understanding the academic and developmental needs of *all* students, while also ensuring these students receive the instructional support to meet those identified needs (Harrison et al., 2012). The varying ranges of support provided to students during their secondary education experience and the postsecondary transition phase leads researchers to one overarching question: if the academic, social, and interpersonal needs of students with LDs are not met prior to their enrollment in a higher education institution, how can it be ensured that these students are provided with the necessary support services and instructional methods to succeed at this level?

Overview of Related Research

Current research in the field of special education provides a substantial amount of evidence regarding the impactful influences of transition and postsecondary education supports for students with LDs. Although previous research has thoroughly explored the impact of support programs, current research does not appear to identify the correlation between secondary education curriculum, postsecondary transition experiences, and college support programs in relation to the development of self-advocacy, self-determination, persistence, and academic independence. As found by Field et al. (2003), the majority of previous research has focused on the development of self-determination among students in middle and high school, while minimal research has focused on the area of postsecondary education in relation to college preparation instruction provided in high school and during the transition to higher education. Zheng, Erickson, Kingston, and Noonan (2014) further explored the impact of previous research on the integration of self-determination and self-concept instruction by concluding that these developmental areas have been shown to have a positive impact on campus integration and engagement in higher education; however, minimal research outlines the direct relationship between these concepts and academic achievement (Konrad, Fowler, Walker, Test, & Wood, 2007). In addition to the lack of conducted research in the area of academic supports on the development of self-determination, Hadley (2006) found that minimal research lies in the area of “identifying the experiences and feelings of college students with learning disabilities from the voice of the students themselves” (p. 10). In order to fulfill the need for additional research in this field, the current study provided students with an

opportunity to *voice* their experiences through personal narratives in relation to the impact of secondary and postsecondary formal and informal support services on their level of academic achievement.

A significant amount of research in the field of higher education focuses on the substantial impact of transitional supports for students with LDs entering the world of higher education (Hadley, 2006), comprehensive support services in higher education and how these services benefit students with learning disabilities (Field et al., 2003), and factors impacting the development of academic determination and persistence (Konrad et al., 2007); however, current research does not appear to focus on influential relationships found among the engagement in previous secondary education curriculum rooted in college preparation, the use of higher education comprehensive support programs, and the establishment of informal support systems on the development of determination, intent to persist, and academic achievement among students with LDs (Zheng et al., 2014). Also lacking in current research is the ability to identify the perceived impact of higher education comprehensive support programs and how these support services aid in the development of determination and academic achievement among students with LDs. To aid in the thorough investigation of research, an additional review of related literature can be found in chapter two. The following concepts were widely used throughout the development of the present research and will be outlined in the next section: learning disability, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, self-advocacy, self-determination, and persistence.

Concept Definitions

Learning Disability (LD). LDs, often referred to as *hidden disabilities*, can impact the academic, social, and/or emotional needs of many students (Wolf, 2001). As referenced by Wolf (2001), “The term hidden refers to the fact that these disabilities are less visible than other physical, sensory or mobility impairments and thus may not be readily apparent to the observer” (p. 387). In this study, LD is defined as it is historically as a “disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in these skills” and includes a “deficit in academic skills (i.e. reading, writing, mathematics)” (U.S. Office of Education, 1968, p. 34). As further outlined in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the term ‘specific learning disability’ is referred to as a disorder in the process involved in understanding and/or using language, including written or spoken, which may impact an individual’s ability to verbalize, listen, spell, read, write, and/or complete mathematical computations (Education for All Handicapped Students Act, 1975).

Americans with Disabilities Act & Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 also play significant roles in the academic accessibility for students with LDs (DaDeppo, 2009). Both ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 set expectations for colleges and universities and “require that institutions receiving federal funding provide reasonable accommodations to college students who meet eligibility for having a disability” (DaDeppo, 2009, p. 122). Students new to the postsecondary environment find themselves transitioning from the coverage and support of mandated

rights and accommodations outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2018), which are managed by parents, teachers, and educational administrators, to a system in which many of the legally mandated academic accommodations require self-initiation and the use of advocacy skills (Skinner, 1998). As further explained by Skinner (1998), once the transition from high school to college occurs, it is imperative that students be aware of their mandated rights under the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Self-Advocacy. In this study, self-advocacy is defined as the “ability to recognize and meet the needs specific to one’s learning disability without compromising the dignity of oneself or others”(Brinckerhoff, 1994, p. 23). Self-advocacy includes three skill types: (1) knowledge of needs, (2) knowledge of legally mandated accommodations, and (3) ability to establish and reach goals (Brinckerhoff, 1994). More specifically, Skinner (1998) outlines the desired skill set among students who display effective self-advocacy skills, which includes: “(a) demonstrate understanding of their disability, (b) are aware of their legal rights, and, (c) demonstrate competence in communicating rights and needs to those in positions of authority” (p. 280). Academic success among students with LDs in higher education is largely impacted by one’s ability to advocate for their needs (Skinner, 1998). When providing effective self-advocacy skills to professors, staff, and college administrators, students must be aware of their strengths and weaknesses and acquire the ability to address and communicate their specific needs.

Self-Determination. Self-determination encompasses the idea that students become active participants in their own academic achievement with developed tendencies

towards growth and mastery (Emery, Heath, & Mills, 2016), and has been associated with improved physical and psychological health, higher self-esteem, and enhanced general well being (Anctil, Ishikawa, & Scott, 2008). In a broader sense, as defined by Solberg, Howard, Gresham, and Carter (2012), self-determination can be described as acquiring the “skills, attitudes, drive, and supports necessary to lead a life that is personally valued” (p. 86). More specifically, Wehmeyer and Little (2009) outline self-determination as theories within human attributes that includes “origin of his or her actions, has high aspirations, perseveres in the face of obstacles, sees more and varied options for action, learns from failures, and overall, has a greater sense of well-being” (p. 868). Self-determination is significantly impacted by an “individual’s values, knowledge, and skills, as well as by environmental factors” (Zheng et al., 2014, p. 463). In this study, self-determination and persistence are defined as the development and utilization of acquired skills, the use of formal and informal supports, drive, and attitude to become academically independent and successful students (Solberg et al., 2012). The present study measured the development of self-determination and persistence skills through the voice of the students, the use of support services, and reported grade point averages.

Persistence. In the present study, the term persistence refers to “the action or fact of persisting and the quality that allows someone to continue doing something or trying to do something even though it is difficult” (Merriam-Webster, 2018, para. 1). In relation to academic persistence, DaDeppo (2009) reported, “while academic integration is important for predicting persistence of college students with LD, social integration may be most powerful” (p. 128). The provided finding outlines the importance of academic

and social integration on a student's ability to persist in college (DaDeppo, 2009). For the purpose of this study, academic success, in relation to determination and intent to persist, was defined as, and either supported or refuted by, students' perceived levels of determination and persistence. In order to evaluate the level of determination and intent to persist among study participants, the researcher analyzed the perceived impact of high school and college support services on the development of these shared attributes.

Academic Achievement. In the present study, grade point averages (GPA) were used to outline students' academic achievement (DaDeppo, 2009). The researcher utilized shared interpretations through student interviews and reported GPAs to better understand the students' academic success in college. In order to further explore the impact of support services on student success in college, the researcher gathered findings in regard to students' perceptions of academic success while also recording the participants' semester GPAs through the use of a University database. Academic achievement was measured using students' GPA on a 0.0 to 4.0 scale.

Research Questions

To investigate the proposed research questions and to further explore the theory-based research in this field, this study employed a qualitative methodological approach, which included the utilization of in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Study participants included students enrolled in Achieve Success at one Midwest University. Since the participant group included students from an underrepresented population, the proper regulatory compliance requirements were submitted by the researcher and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB approval letter is provided in Appendix

A. The purpose of the individual interviews was to discover the various views, perceptions, and experiences shared by each participant in relation to LD diagnoses, educational and transitional experiences, level of engagement in support services, and perceived levels of determination and intent to persist in a higher education setting. In order to address the posed research questions, this study focused on educational and personal experiences while also placing an emphasis the areas of determination and intent to persist to further explore how these variables impact overall success in college. The present study utilized a narrative-based approach to qualitative research in order to gain a better understanding of lived experiences. Through the use of a narrative-based approach, students were provided with the opportunity to share their voices as they relate to academic experiences. The present study included both an initial and follow up interview, which resulted in a total of twelve individual interviews. Each participant engaged in a total of two individual interviews over the course of the study. Data analysis began after the completion of the individual interviews. Following the interviews, themes and categories were generated. Based on the generated themes and categories, the researcher coded the data. The individualized follow-up interviews were then conducted. Following the conclusion of the interviews, the findings were categorized and coded. To ensure data reliability, member checks were utilized throughout the course of the study. The researcher also received inter-rater reliability feedback from a second reader to support study findings. A detailed description of research methodology and framework is outlined in chapter three. The research questions for the present study include:

Do college students with LDs perceive the secondary transition curriculum and support services they engaged in as supportive to their college success?

Do college students with disabilities perceive informal supports as supportive and crucial to their academic, social, emotional, and environmental adjustment to postsecondary education?

Do college students with LDs perceive postsecondary support programs that focus on the development of self-advocacy, determination, and academic independence as supportive to their college success?

Student demographics and an analysis of research findings related to the posed research questions are included in chapter four. Further analysis and interpretation of research findings as they relate to previous literature in this field is revealed in chapter five.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

For many students with learning disabilities (LD), navigating the world of higher education can be challenging. According to the U.S Department of Education (1968), LD is historically defined as “a deficit in academic skills (e.g., in reading, mathematics, writing)” and is identified as “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in these skills” (p. 34). As concluded by DaDeppo (2009), “individuals with LD often exhibit lower self-esteem, higher anxiety, and demonstrate poor interpersonal skills, resulting in difficulty with self-advocacy and social interactions, necessary skills for success in college” (p. 123). These additional challenges experienced by many students with disabilities can hinder their ability to successfully execute the academic, social, and emotional demands of higher education.

Although the number of students with LDs enrolling in higher education institutions is on the rise, and match the rate of the general population (67%), only 41% of students with learning disabilities earn a college degree compared to 52% completion rate of their peers in the general population (Showers & Kinsman, 2017). A lower graduation rate for students with LDs can be attributed to the many challenges these students face when adjusting to a higher education environment, and the heightened academic, social, and emotional demands at that level (Lombardi et al., 2011). The success of students at the postsecondary level is largely impacted by the extrinsic supports available to students throughout their educational careers. The supports provided

to students during their academic journeys can largely impact their success in regard to academic demands, social expectations, and personal/emotional growth at the postsecondary level (Connor, 2012). The success and intent to persist among students with LDs in college are largely impacted by postsecondary education transition experiences and the utilization of comprehensive postsecondary education support programs. To further investigate the impact of support systems on the academic success of students with LDs in higher education, postsecondary education transitional supports, comprehensive support programs in higher education, and factors impacting the development of academic persistence are further explored.

Transitional Supports

When entering the world of higher education, students are often faced with an increased level of academic, social, and emotional demands (Herbert et al., 2014). These transitional needs can be challenging for all students and require a significant amount of adaptability. When transitioning from high school to college, students with disabilities are faced with additional demands, including: developing an understanding of their disability and how to disclose their disability to others, an increased need in the development of self-advocacy skills, and the ability to adapt to a less structured educational environment (McCall, 2015; Troiano et al., 2010). The postsecondary education transition can be difficult and frustrating for many students with LDs. McDonald and Farrell (2012) outline the importance of secondary education curriculum by stating, “School design and structure have an immediate and profound effect on students’ academic progress” (p. 217-218). When transitioning from a comprehensive

approach to instruction in a special education setting to the world of higher education, students experience the need to significantly adapt to an environment with less structure, support, and a significantly higher demand for higher level, abstract thinking and learning (Troiano et al., 2010). As outlined by Troiano et al. (2010), “Often, these students may not be prepared for the level of diligence, self-control, self-evaluation, decision-making, and goal setting that success in college requires” (p. 36). The addressed concerns leave one overarching question: how do we, as educators, ensure that students are provided with the necessary skills, techniques, and knowledge to become successful learners at the postsecondary level? To ensure the needs of all students are met, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that the framework for transition services include “a coordinated set of activities based on students’ strengths, preferences, and interests, that includes students in transition planning activities” (McCall, 2015, p. 162). Although IDEA mandates the development and utilization of a strong transition curriculum, students are leaving the secondary education environment with an increased need for skill development and many higher education institutions must fill this educational gap by providing programs that facilitate self-advocacy, determination, organization, and other related skills and techniques that are not further developed in high school (Skinner, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Although there may be gaps within the secondary education transition curriculum, the continued development of transition programs provided through postsecondary institutions are providing students with the instructional needs to further impact their academic success in college (McDonald and Farrell, 2012; Skinner, 1998). As outlined by McDonald and Farrell

(2012), the challenging transition from secondary experiences to postsecondary expectations is one of the major reasons why students experienced a heightened level of stress and frustration when beginning the collegiate journey. In order to meet the high demands of higher education, institutions, such as high schools, must ensure that students with disabilities are provided with an appropriate transitional framework that fosters achievement and success throughout their academic careers.

In support of the significant impact of comprehensive transition support services for students with disabilities transiting to a higher education institution, Solberg et al. (2012) explored the structure of a secondary learning environment and the development of self-efficacy, motivation, and academic achievement among high school students receiving special education support. Solberg et al. (2012) concluded that students with greater involvement in a comprehensive secondary transition curriculum experienced increased self-efficacy, increased engagement in goal setting, increased motivation, and reportedly higher grades. Study findings only reinforce the value and importance of providing students with a comprehensive, meaningful, thought-provoking, and engaging high school curricular program that supports the development of essential skills to successfully navigate the postsecondary education transition (Solberg et al., 2012). The findings also set the stage for a growing prominence in educational research on recognizing varying factors that impact and support students with disabilities “to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to make successful postsecondary transitions, including self-determination” (Solberg et al., 2012).

Extrinsic transitional supports play a significant role in the journey from a high school setting to a higher education environment for many students with LDs, and providing students in high school with the proper knowledge and skills to successfully navigate the higher education environment is crucial to the success at this level (Connor, 2012). The Taxonomy for Transition Programming is an evidence-based practice designed by Kohler and Field (2003) which outlines a framework of five domains for best transition practices, which include: student development, student-focused planning, collaboration, family involvement, and program structure. Kohler and Field (2003) suggest instructional interventions focusing on these five domains will provide students with an educational framework that will enhance the transition experience for students with LDs (McCall, 2015). Further research by McDonald and Farrell (2012) outlined the instructional impact of an Early College High School (ECHS) that was designed and implemented at a public community college in Texas. The ECHS provided an instructional framework geared toward higher-level coursework, college course offerings, community outreach and collaboration, and field placements, and was designed to provide students with the necessary tools and strategies for a successful transition from high school to college (McDonald & Farrell, 2012). Researchers studied the academic, social, and personal preparedness of student participants and found that skills such as motivation, self-efficacy, academic and social support, and self-management were identified as meaningful motivators in learning and academic success (McDonald & Farrell, 2012). Researchers revealed that social interactions, motivation, and academic-based skills significantly impacted students' ability to successfully transition from high

school to college (McDonald & Farrell, 2012). The provided research places a significant emphasis on the importance of providing students with the appropriate academic, social, and emotional instructional techniques to assess and navigate the world of higher education.

When examining the influential impact of transition preparation and support, researchers conducted a study that examined the experiences of four college students with varying diagnosed disabilities, including: LD, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), hearing impairment, and blindness (McCall, 2015). The conducted quantitative study explored the shared experiences among study participants, and outlined how participants drew on previously explored resources and developed skills when navigating the environmental demands and expectations of college (McCall, 2015). Study participants shared common factors that had an impact on their successful transition from high school to postsecondary education, including: family support, inclusion in high school general education curriculum, and the development of advocacy skills (McCall, 2015). Many instructional factors and experiences have been found to impact students' ability to successfully transition from high school to college. Research has revealed that effective instructional support in high school and the utilization of explicit support services on the campuses of postsecondary education institutions can have a profound impact on a student's ability to successfully adapt to higher-level academic demands (Connor, 2012; Harrison et al., 2012; Joshi & Bouck, 2017; McCall, 2015).

Students experience a significant shift in expectations from relying on the high school system and administrators to ensure that appropriate accommodations are made

and provided, to meeting the demands of a postsecondary institution setting where students with LD are expected to become self-aware, understand their legal rights and responsibilities as a student with a disability, and utilize acquired self-advocacy skills to seek out and access the services and accommodations available to them (DaDeppo, 2009). As found by McCall (2015) through participant interviews of four college students with varying disabilities, participation in inclusive educational experiences, the development of self-advocacy skills, and informal supports were indicated as common factors impacting a successful transition to college (McCall, 2015). The research concludes that the difficult transition from high school to higher education requires thorough instruction and a heightened level of support in the areas of self-advocacy, self-determination, and disability identity for students with LDs (McCall, 2015).

Similar to evidence revealed by McCall (2015) and Connor (2012) found that student participants shared similar commonalities regarding self-directed actions concerning academic success at the postsecondary level. These shared commonalities included: disability disclosure to the Office of Disability Services, discussions regarding appropriate accommodations, proactivity in notifying professors of their documented LD, and managing time appropriately (Connor, 2012). These shared experiences among students with LDs in college not only emphasize the importance of thorough and purposeful transition instruction throughout high school, but also shed light on the importance of the development and utilization of self-advocacy skills to successfully navigate the higher education environment.

Comprehensive Support Programs

In addition to mandated academic accommodations, an increasing number of postsecondary education institutions now offer a variety of comprehensive support systems to better meet the needs of students with varying disabilities (Sparks & Lovett, 2013). Often when transitioning from high school to college, students with LDs will experience an increased need for intensified support (Parker & Boutelle, 2009). Many comprehensive support programs at the collegiate level focus on fostering the development of academic independence, self-advocacy skills, and self-determination along with providing mandated academic accommodations (Troiano et al., 2010). When exploring the impact of intensive remedial and academic support programs for students with LDs, research suggests that support services promote the establishment of self-determination and autonomy of students with disabilities (Parker & Boutelle, 2009).

Although previously conducted research reveals that the impact of intensive remedial support is significant, as further explored by Herbert et al. (2014), the 2009 Florida College System study revealed that students perceived negative perceptions regarding LDs, limited knowledge regarding accommodation access, and minimal instructional development of self-advocacy skills as barriers to success in college. As referenced by DaDeppo (2009), Tinto's Student Integration Model "proposed that students' experiences at college, primarily the extent to which they become socially and academically integrated, have a direct impact on their institutional and goal commitment and thus retention" (p. 123). Tinto's model outlines the importance of an instructional framework that meets not only the higher-level academic demands of higher education,

but also the social and emotional barriers that students may encounter (DaDeppo, 2009). Often when students with LDs engage in postsecondary education transition and enter the world of higher education, they will likely need more support (Parker & Boutelle, 2009). Many educational experts have suggested that students with learning disabilities benefit from programs that provide training in self-advocacy and social skill development in order to meet the high demands of higher education (DaDeppo, 2009).

To further explore the impact of self-advocacy and social skill development and to better meet the needs of students with LDs, the Learning Opportunities Task Force (LOTF) program was established in 1997 (Harrison et al., 2012). The LOTF program was initiated to better address the needs of students with LDs at the postsecondary level, including the transition to college phase (Harrison et al., 2012). Research conducted by Harrison et al. (2012) included reports from 13 LOTF pilot programs instituted across Ontario, Canada. The LOTF pilot programs “implemented intensive learning skills, education, and self-advocacy interventions” (p.57) and provided these instructional techniques to students with LDs enrolled in the program. Participant surveys revealed 82.9% of respondents indicated that participation in the LOTF program “contributed significantly to their academic success”, while a significantly lower percentage (5.4%) reported that the program “contributed somewhat” (Harrison et al., 2012, p. 60). A meaningful percentage of participants (99.5%) indicated that they would participate in the program again and/or refer a friend to the program (Harrison et al., 2012). When comparing pre- and post-test measures, researchers found that respondents reported an increased understanding of their LD identities, a greater ability to self-advocate, and a

significantly lower dropout rate when compared to the national average (Harrison et al., 2012). As indicated by study researchers, “Overall, the majority of participants reported that participation in the LOTF program contributed significantly to their academic success and would participate again in such a program” (Harrison et al., 2012, p. 55). The findings demonstrate the significant impact of higher-level academic, social, *and* emotional support for students with LDs in higher education.

Researchers studied the impact of comprehensive supports offered to students with LDs and ADHD enrolled in a support program offered at a small, private higher education institution (Troiano et al., 2010). Researchers studied the effectiveness of the Learning Resource Center (LRC) and the varying levels of differentiated supports (level one: comprehensive, level two: enhanced, level three: entitled) offered (Troiano et al., 2010). The level of support provided varied throughout the three instructional levels, with level one including intensive learning and writing assistance while level two and three included lower levels of comprehensive support (Troiano et al., 2010). Level one [comprehensive support] included four hours of individualized and small group work, and assistance from a learning and writing specialist, level two [enhanced support] included two hours of individualized and small group work, and assistance from a learning and writing specialist, and level three [entitled support] included student-initiated appointments with a LRC staff member (Troiano et al., 2010). Researchers compared attendance levels to academic success among program participants, and found that students with a higher level of attendance had higher rates of success as indicated by their reported overall grade point averages (Troiano et al., 2010). Researchers revealed

that the level of learning support received was a meaningful predictor of graduation from a postsecondary education institution (Troiano et al., 2010). The reported findings provided by Troiano et al. (2010) indicate the importance of the integrated level of support in relation to collegiate success and persistence to graduation. These findings provide insight into the impactful influences of comprehensive support programs for students with LDs in higher education. Previously conducted research revealed the impactful influences of intensive support services at the collegiate level that focus on meeting the needs of the *whole* student (DaDeppo, 2009; Harrison et al., 2012; Troiano et al., 2010).

Research has also outlined the impactful influence of peer mentoring for students with LDs in postsecondary education (Parker & Boutelle, 2009; Vogel, Fresko, & Wertheim, 2007). Researchers previously determined that student mentoring and tutoring programs on college campuses promote social integration and graduation (Yssel, Pak, & Beilke, 2016). While utilizing a peer coaching approach, Zwart and Kallemeyn (2001) found that students with LDs and/or ADHD made significant gains in the areas of study skills, time management, motivation, and anxiety (Parker & Boutelle, 2009). Lombardi et al. (2011) further support the evidence of beneficial outcomes of peer mentoring by outlining that students with strong peer support typically experience more positive outcomes which may include structured tutoring, study groups providing content support, peer mentoring, or social engagements outside of the educational setting (Finn, 1998; Gulam & Triska, 1998; Kowalsky & Fresko, 2002). Further exploration by Field and Hoffman (2012) revealed that positive relationships are a main driving force behind the

development of self-determination which in turn places a significant emphasis on the importance of relationship building and its impact on postsecondary transition and success in college. As stated by Parker and Boutelle (2009), “executive functioning coaching provides support for the development of skills, strategies, and beliefs needed to manage executive function challenges” (p.205). Peer coaching provides students with the ability to self-reflect, establish academic and personal goals, and enhance academic performance (Parker & Boutelle, 2009).

Similar to findings by Zwart and Kallemeyn (2001), research conducted by Parker and Boutelle (2009) found that participant surveys and interviews revealed substantial gains in the areas of study skills, prioritizing, time management strategies, and self-regulation techniques for students that engaged in peer mentoring support. Similar to the findings outlined by Parker and Boutelle (2009) and Zwart and Kallemeyn (2001), Vogel et al. (2007) revealed, “both tutees and tutors perceived tutoring as very beneficial to the tutees, and the level of satisfaction with the program for both groups was high” (p.492). Previous findings support a significant interest in program participation, and the influential impact support services had on overall student achievement and intent to persist. While support services at the collegiate level for students with LDs have an impact on academic success, it is also important to further explore the many environmental and personality factors affecting student determination and intent to persist in college. The importance to further study the influence of self-determination and intent to persist in college is significant when studying the determining factors of success for students with LDs enrolled in higher education.

Self-Determination and Intent to Persist

Self-determination and intent to persist are important contributing factors to student success in higher education. Recent research has concluded that “an individual trait of grit” (Weisskirch, 2016, p. 1) – “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007, p. 1087) has been linked to success and achievement in a variety of environments, including academia. In further support of instruction that links to personality development, Field et al. (2003) revealed the importance of self-determination skill development as a central focus of postsecondary education support programs for students with disabilities. When exploring the educational impact of self-determination, it is important to note that students with LDs who report high levels of self-determination and self-concept are more likely to experience social integration, academic achievement, and collegiate success (Zheng et al., 2014). Recent research has further identified that direct instruction of self-determination skills and strategies has a positive impact on persistence and achievement among students with learning disabilities (Zheng et al., 2014). Previous research outlines the educational impact of providing students with a secondary curriculum that is rich in the development and utilization of self-determination among students with learning disabilities. As researched by McCall (2015), development of both self-determination and self-advocacy skills are crucial for students with disabilities in college because the level of expectations and responsibilities, in regard to disability disclosure and disability self-identity, are heightened.

When exploring the development of self-determination, Anctil et al. (2008) indicated the five foundational traits regarding self-determination, including: self-advocacy, self-actualization, assertiveness, creativity, and pride. The development and utilization of these five identified traits are imperative for success at the postsecondary level (Anctil et al., 2008). As established by Field and Hoffman (2012), the model of self-determination outlines five determining characteristics associated with the effective development and utilization of self-determination skills in academia, including: “know yourself and your environment, value yourself, plan, act, experience outcomes, and learn” (p. 7). The personality attributes outlined by Field and Hoffman (2012) focus primarily on “factors within the individual’s control- the knowledge and skills that enable an individual to be self-determined in environments of varying levels of receptivity and support” (p. 343).

In accordance with these foundational attributes, and to further explore the impact of self-determination and persistence, research conducted by Madson-Ankeny and Lehmann (2011) focused on the beneficial impact of a secondary transition program on the development of self-determination among college bound students. Findings collected from individual interviews supported the significant impact of three dominant themes on the development of self-determination, including: locus of control, self-awareness, and goal-directed behavior (Madson-Ankeny & Lehmann, 2011). Madson-Ankeny and Lehmann (2011) further explained that the community college environment, where the transition program took place, provided students with the opportunity to further expand their levels of self-determination, including act, experience outcomes, and learn which

closely aligned with Field and Hoffman's (1994) Model of Self-Determination. Findings reported by Madson-Ankeny and Lehmann (2011) provide a clearer understanding of the importance of integrating self-determination skill development into secondary education curricula by honing in on the success of students engaged in such programs.

While exploring the educational impact of the development of self-determination skills, it is important to note that the establishment of self-determination among students with LDs in higher education has been associated with higher self-esteem, improved physical and emotional health, and improved overall well being (Anctil et al., 2008). Researchers have reported that the impactful effects of the development of self-determination among college students with LDs are essential for student success at this level (Anctil et al, 2008; Field & Hoffman, 1994). In relation to self-determination development, Anctil et al. (2008) further explored academic identity and development by establishing four significant themes that emerged from the conducted research, including: "persistence, competence, career decision making, and self-realization" (p. 168). Researchers found that the development of the four indicated themes were integral in the establishment of self-identity and determination (Anctil et al., 2008). As further indicated by Yssel et al. (2016), the development of self-determination and persistence is crucial to successfully transition to college and to effectively meet the academic expectations at that level. In further support of these findings, Field et al. (2003) discovered that student participants indicated the importance of providing higher education support programs that focus on environmental factors and specific personality traits, including: social support, accessibility of faculty, and the development of sustained persistence and autonomy.

The importance of the utilization of campus support systems to address academic, social, and emotional needs is further supported by previously conducted research which revealed that the “level of academic integration has a direct impact on decisions to persist” (DaDeppo, 2009, p. 124). DaDeppo (2009) explored the relationship between academic and social integration in relation to academic success and intent to persist among college students with LDs. While conducting this research, DaDeppo (2009) further explored the impact of the resources provided by the Disability Resource Center (DRC) on a large, public university campus. The DRC offered varying academic services, including: individualized and small group tutoring sessions, peer and staff mentoring, access to a writing skills coordinator, group workshops geared toward the development of higher level strategies and techniques, and private computer lab access (DaDeppo, 2009). The services provided through DRC focused on providing students with the appropriate self-advocacy and self-determination skills necessary to achieve success at the postsecondary level (DaDeppo, 2009). As found by DaDeppo (2009), the extent to which a student becomes involved within an institution has a direct impact on the level of academic and social integration within the new environment, which further supports the idea of intensive academic, social, and emotional supports for students with LDs in college. As further determined, academic and social involvements were significant predictors of students’ intent to persist in the postsecondary education environment (DaDeppo, 2009). DaDeppo (2009) concluded, “These factors are considered determinants of the likelihood of a student remaining at the institution” (p.

124). When referencing student retention and persistence, academic and social involvement within a higher education setting is crucial for success at this level.

Conclusion

The transitional experience from high school to higher education can be daunting and overwhelming for many students with LDs. Through the transition process, students move from an environment that is led by teachers and administrators, to an educational setting that relies on strong self-advocacy skills and self-efficacy to succeed. These additional responsibilities outline the importance of providing students with a strong transition curriculum before the transition to college begins, and also establishes the significance and influential impact of extrinsic academic, social, and emotional support at the higher education level. Current research in the field of higher education predominantly focuses on the significant benefits of transitional supports for students with learning disabilities entering the world of higher education, comprehensive support services in higher education, and how these services benefit students with learning disabilities and the development of academic determination and persistence. However, current research does not appear to identify the correlation between higher education comprehensive support programs and how these support services aid in the development of determination and intent to persist among students with learning disabilities. The importance of providing students with the opportunity to voice their experiences is crucial when exploring the importance of such support systems. Through this qualitative study, students will be provided with the opportunity to share their educational, personal, social, and emotional experiences. Student participants will have an opportunity to shed a

light on the impact of postsecondary transition services and comprehensive support services on the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with LDs, and how the provided comprehensive supports influence self-determination skills and intent to persist in higher education. The present study will aim to examine the indicated research questions:

Do college students with LDs perceive the secondary transition curriculum and support services they engaged in as supportive to their college success?

Do college students with disabilities perceive informal supports as supportive and crucial to their academic, social, emotional, and environmental adjustment to postsecondary education?

Do college students with LDs perceive postsecondary support programs that focus on the development of self-advocacy, determination, and academic independence as supportive to their college success?

The theoretical and conceptual framework methods used to measure the outlined research questions are addressed in chapter three.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived impact of informal support, secondary transition instruction, and postsecondary education support programs on the development of determination, persistence, and academic success among students with learning disabilities (LD).

Theoretical Framework

In order to further examine the perceived impact of support services among students with LDs, the present study utilized a narrative-based qualitative research approach. The idea of narrative-based research stems from the concept as ‘life as a narrative’ where individuals are provided with an opportunity to engage and construct meaning through creating, telling, hearing, and reading stories (Golsteijn & Wright, 2013). Narrative inquiry provides the opportunity to explore and understand human experiences through stories, which, in turn, aids in gaining a better understanding of human interactions, experiences, and phenomenon (Kim, 2016). As the term applies to research, a narrative approach to gathering data seeks to apply an analytical approach by engaging in shared stories and perceptions in order to make sense of personal, social, and emotional experiences (Golsteijn & Wright, 2013). In the present study, a narrative-based research method was utilized to provide the researcher with an opportunity to engage in in-depth stories and experiences shared by student participants. Through the use of individual interviews, contextual inquiries set the stage for a greater access to an

increased understanding of shared experiences, actions, and thoughts through personal narratives. Through the use of qualitative research in the present study, a narrative-based approach poses many benefits to gathering meaningful data through shared experiences, including: insight into lived experiences, exploration of the *meaning* of shared experiences, insight to events that have occurred over a significant range of time, an emphasis on the personal, social, and emotional, and an opportunity to engage in story-telling with an individual with lived experience (Carless & Douglas, 2017).

Argument for Research Method

The present study utilized a narrative-based approach to qualitative research, which provided participants with the opportunity to share personal experiences related to the use of support services and academic programs. Through this research method, participants were able to share both the perceived positive and negative impacts of support services on the development of college-level skills while also providing insight into the perceived development of self-determination and academic achievement. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, participants were encouraged to share personal narratives related to educational experiences and the perceived impact of those shared experiences. While utilizing a narrative-based approach to gathering meaningful, thought-provoking insight, the researcher was provided with an opportunity to dive into the experiences and perceptions shared by students in order to gain a better understanding of the individual and the impact of these shared events.

As revealed by Block and Weatherford (2013), providing students, especially those with disabilities, with the opportunity to engage in story-telling is a unique and

beneficial way to gain a deeper understanding of the sometimes challenging experiences encountered by these individuals. In support of the use of narratives to provide students with a *voice*, Hansen and Philo (2007) shared that, “understanding the embodied reality of disability in everyday life is crucial” (p.498). For researchers in higher education, learning through the narrative and storytelling lens of individuals with disabilities is crucial when seeking to explore the varying complexities of individuals with diverse academic, personal, social, and emotional needs. As outlined by Block and Weatherford (2013), “The experiences of these individuals is best told through the lived narratives of those who live in distinctive bodies and because of those differences face unique challenges” (p. 501). In order to embody the experiences of students with disabilities, providing an opportunity to *voice* experiences and perceptions is crucial when exploring students’ shared academic and personal hurdles. By reflecting on these previous experiences through the use of narratives and storytelling, the researcher gained insightful findings that revealed the significant impact of support services on the success of students in higher education. Figure 1 outlines a visual representation of the conceptual framework utilized in the current study.

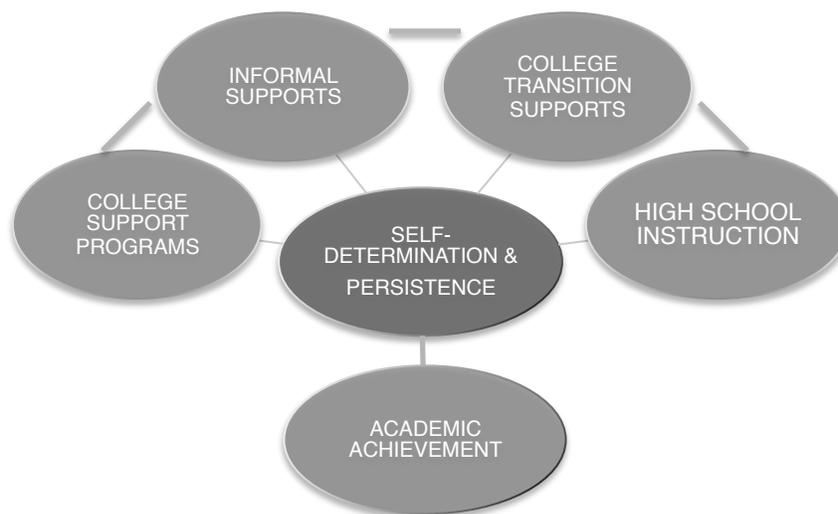


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Setting and Participants

The study setting was on the campus of one Midwest University. During the course of the study, the University had an enrollment total of approximately 14,000 students. During the duration of the present study, the remedial-focused, comprehensive support program [Achieve Success] outlined in this study served approximately 300 current students with diagnosed disabilities. Achieve Success provided students with access to academic accommodations and comprehensive, remedial services that provided students with individualized academic, social, and emotional support. All incoming students are assigned an Organizational Tutor (OT) through Achieve Success. OT's provide students with individualized support that focus on meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of each individual student while also further developing the necessary skills to academically achieve in college, including: self-advocacy and self-determination. Achieve Success also provides students with access to academic accommodations, including: extended testing, distraction-reduced environment, exam

reader, proofreader, scribe, use of calculator, note-taking support, spelling support on in-class assignments, and access to electronic textbooks.

The Achieve Success program also offers a six-week summer transition program and a variety of remedial courses that focus on the development of self-advocacy, academic independency, academic persistence, determination, reading strategies, reading comprehension techniques, study strategies, memory techniques, note-taking skills, academic accommodation use, and campus resource exploration. The interviews occurred in a private, distraction-reduced location within the Achieve Success office. The setting included dim lighting to support a calm, welcoming, and secure environment. Study participants included a total of six undergraduate students enrolled in the program. Participants were chosen, at random, through the use of the Achieve Success database (FileMaker) and Microsoft Excel software. Through the use of FileMaker, currently enrolled students who completed the Achieve Success summer program, were grouped and exported into an Excel spreadsheet. A total of 73 students were included in the initial group of possible participants. Through the use of Microsoft Excel, and the random sampling formula, a total of six students participants were selected at random. All student participants received a previous diagnosis that may have had an impact on their academic, social, and/or emotional needs.

Research Procedure

Before beginning the research process, the researcher completed the CITI: Social-Behavioral-Educational Research training to ensure optimal understanding of research guidelines and requirements. Following the completion of research training, the

researcher submitted an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application to the IRB office for approval. The approval of the IRB ensured minimal risks and the absence of coercion. To ensure proper research protocol was followed, the following forms were provided and administered: the IRB research approval letter (Appendix A), the Informed Consent Document for Research Participants (Appendix B), and the Informed Consent Document for Conducting Audio-Recorded Interviews (Appendix C). Prior to the start of the research study, student participants were provided with procedure details and consent documents. If the participants chose to engage in the study, they were asked to sign and submit both consent forms.

Prior to the signing of research consent forms, students were provided with a detailed written and verbal description of the role of student participants in the present study. To ensure consent was freely and voluntarily obtained, students were encouraged to take the discussed consent forms with them for further review and, if they were interested in participating in the study, were asked to submit the forms at a later date. Research precautions were also outlined in the participant consent forms. Once the researcher received the signed consent forms from the participating students, the scheduling process of individual interviews began. This study included in-depth, semi-structured interviews that provided student participants with the opportunity to voice their prior educational and personal experiences. Each participant engaged in two individual interviews, which included both an initial and follow-up interview. Therefore, the researcher engaged in and conducted 12 individual participant interviews. Each individual interview lasted, on average, 40 minutes in length.

Data Collection

The data collection method included semi-structured interviews that were administered in an individualized, private setting. Six student participants engaged in a series of two individualized interviews, which included an initial and follow-up interview. The initial individual interview protocol is provided in Appendix D and the follow up interview protocol is provided in Appendix E. Throughout the course of the study, a total of 12 individual interviews were conducted. The individual interviews were conducted first and the follow-up interviews followed. Both the initial and follow up interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Following the individual interviews, the researcher verified preliminary findings through member checks. Individual member checks were conducted to ensure consistency of data. In order to conduct member checks following the individual interviews, the researcher shared interview transcripts with study participants, so that the students were provided with an opportunity to review findings and provide feedback. Once the individual interviews were analyzed and coded, the researcher used the findings to develop the follow-up interview protocol. The researcher referred to the determined initial codes, outlined in Table 2, to create a follow up protocol that was both comprehensive and meaningful while also encompassing a focus on the posed research questions. Following the development of the follow up protocol, the remaining study interviews were conducted. While using the preliminary data as a guide, the researcher was able to deepen understanding of the collected evidence through the use of follow-up interviews. The researcher conducted a second round of member checks by providing participants with a transcription of their interview, which ensured reliability of

compiled data. While using a narrative-based approach, the researcher analyzed the collected data, along with the preliminary findings gathered through initial interviews, and determined the need to add additional codes to the previously determined themes.

Through the participation in this study, students were asked to share information in regard to their previous academic experiences, including: special education support; transition instruction; academic, social, emotional, interpersonal needs; utilization of support services and programs; the impact of formal and informal support systems, involvement in the higher education comprehensive support program, and their perceived level of determination. Through the study interviews, students engaged in semi-structured prompting and provided verbal explanations in response to the posed questions.

Qualitative data collection measures were utilized when compiling and analyzing data from the interviews. Once the interviews were conducted, the data collected were analyzed and coded using a color-coding process and a detailed chart. Following the completion of the coding process, the follow-up interviews were conducted. Findings gathered from the follow-up interviews were compiled, analyzed, and coded. The follow-up interview protocol is provided in Appendix E. While developing the follow up questions, the researcher relied on the preliminary data gathered during the initial interviews while also ensuring that the research questions remained at the forefront of development.

Following the data analysis process, individual member checks, and development of the follow-up interview protocol occurred, the scheduling process for the follow-up interviews began. In terms of the overall data collection process, the series of individual

interviews occurred over an eight-week timeframe. Following the completion of data collection through interviews, student participants received a \$25.00 gift card incentive. It is important to note that if a participant had chosen to withdraw from the study before completion, they would still have received the incentive. Following the conducted interviews, the researcher continued the data analysis and interpretation process. While using the research questions as a guide, the research determined a set of codes that aligned with findings revealed in both the initial and follow-up interviews. Data collected from individualized interviews, the program's accommodation database, and reported GPAs were analyzed and interpreted. After the data was compiled, interpreted, and analyzed, the researcher developed a list of five significant themes present throughout the conducted research.

Data Analysis

In order to most effectively interpret and analyze interview findings, the researcher utilized a coding approach to produce meaningful data based on the narrations provided by student participants. As outlined by Kim (2016), "we analyze narrative data in order to develop an understanding of the meanings our participants give to themselves, to their surroundings, to their lives, and to their lived experiences through storytelling" (p. 189-190). By engaging in storytelling and narration with participants, the researcher aimed to interpret the meanings through analysis of shared academic, interpersonal, and culture experiences.

While utilizing a coding-based approach to explore qualitative data revealed through narratives, the researcher engaged in the data analysis process several times

throughout the course of the study. During the coding process, the researcher focuses on four key elements, including: (1) patterns, (2) categories, (3) themes, and (4) initial and finalized codes (Kim, 2016). Through the use of a qualitative-based coding process, the researcher was able to indicate repetitive patterns and consistencies among student narratives while also narrowing in on the posed research questions. Although indication of similarities among compiled results is crucial, coding data is much more intricate than labeling the similarities found among results; during this process, coding led the researcher to develop ideas and relate those developments to all findings pertaining to those ideas and, therefore, develop overarching themes as they relate to the posed research questions (Saldana, 2009). The researcher relied on preliminary findings gathered from the initial interviews to develop ideas and possible themes, therefore, prior to the completion of initial interviews, the researcher did not have specific ideas related to coding. Table 1 provides a visual outline of the coding process that was conducted during the present study. As outlined in Table 1, the researcher created a detailed chart to assist with determining themes, categories, and codes related to the present research, which is outlined in Appendix F, to assist with the coding process.

Table 1. *Interview Coding Process*

INTERVIEW CODING PROCESS	
1) Conducted initial interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 initial interviews were conducted
2) Analyzed, interpreted, and coded initial interviews by larger codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read initial interviews and color-coded the reoccurrences, similarities/differences found between the interviews • coding chart was created to include the developed codes
3) Conducted follow-up interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 follow-up interviews were conducted
4) Analyzed, interpreted, and coded follow-up interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • previously developed codes were used as a guide to code follow-up interviews • coding chart was used to code data from follow-up interviews
5) Previously determined codes were narrowed down to create overarching themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • codes outlined in the coding chart were specified to align with interview findings • interviews were reread and recoded using the developed themes • refined themes were added to the coding chart • identified interview excerpts as they aligned with the newly developed themes • student quotes and examples were used to illustrate determined themes
6) Inter-rater reliability conducted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • peer was provided with unmarked interview transcripts (12 total) and a blank coding chart with definitions • peer utilized coding chart to code interviews • initial inter-rater reliability: 93.2% • the researcher and peer came to a general consensus and reported an inter-rater reliability score of 95.3%

After the completion of initial interviews, the researcher conducted a thorough analysis of the individual interviews by applying the color-coding technique to outline repetitive patterns and consistencies among interviews and utilized the findings to construct possible categories and themes. In order to generate and determine codes, the researcher focused on shared experiences, events, and perceptions and further examined the reoccurring similarities and differences among the compiled data. Once the themes were outlined, the researcher determined an initial set of codes, which are outlined in Table 2. The initial codes were used to develop the protocol for the second interviews.

After conducting the follow up interviews, the researcher used the color-coding mechanism to complete an initial, thorough analysis of the data. The researcher then utilized the coding chart to indicate consistencies among data. After receiving data from study interviews, the researcher utilized the coding chart to finalize codes. After the coding of both the initial and follow-up interviews, the researcher analyzed the compiled data on the coding chart and further developed and narrowed down the overarching themes that were revealed through consistencies among student interviews. The finalized codes were established through interpreting and analyzing preliminary data received through study interviews. As represented in Table 2, the analysis of research findings revealed five major themes related to the overall impact of support services for students with disabilities.

Table 2. *Coding Chart*

Initial Codes	Finalized Codes
Academic skill development	1) Impact of an engaging, meaningful high school curriculum rooted in self-advocacy, self-determination, and college preparation development
- Study strategies	
- Study environment	
- Time management	
- Organization	
- Decision-making skills	
Personal Attributes	2) Impact of postsecondary education transition support that focuses on college readiness
- Perceived determination	3) Impact of postsecondary education support in academic achievement
- Motivational factors	
- Self-determination skills	
- Anxiety	
- Independency	
- Advocacy-skills	4) Impact of informal support on academic achievement
- Disability identity	5) Impact of the development and utilization of self-determination
Support systems	
- High school vs. college	
- Formal vs. informal	
- Mentor	

Initial Codes	Finalized Codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family involvement - Campus integration - Involvement in student organizations 	
High School curriculum	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation for college - Supported college readiness strategies - Fostered the growth of advocacy skills 	
Postsecondary Education Support	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Postsecondary transition support - Comprehensive program support 	

Grade point averages (GPA) were used as a measure of academic achievement. For the academic semester(s) in which the participants were enrolled in the University, the researcher recorded students' GPAs, as reported in the online University software system, and used this data to either refute or support the academic achievement among study participants. During the course of the study, GPAs were collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Data collected from an academic accommodation database was used to record the use of academic accommodations as outlined in their student file. The academic accommodation database outlined student use of exam accommodations (i.e. extended time, exam reader, exam proofreader). Participant responses provided insight into the impact of transition instruction and college support programs while reported grade point averages (GPA) supported or refuted the perceived levels of determination and academic achievement. Findings compiled from both the initial and follow-up interviews, along with GPAs, were used to provide a triangulation of the data. Following the completion of data analysis and interpretation, study results were shared and

disseminated. During the data collection process, the researcher was the only member with access to this collected information. These results were provided in a confidential manner with no use of student names, educational professionals, administrators, schools, districts, or higher education institutions. Instead, pseudonyms and student codes were used.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the present research study produced valid and useable data that is both accurate and reliable, the researcher conducted member checks throughout the course of the study. Member checks were conducted after both the initial and follow up interviews. When completing member checks, participants were provided with the opportunity to confirm that the interpreted data reflected their shared views and experiences. In order to receive honest and open responses, the researcher built a strong rapport with participants to create a secure environment where students felt comfortable sharing their experiences, interpretations, and perceptions. During the study interviews, the researcher ensured accuracy by providing active listening techniques by questioning and summarizing the shared responses.

To add credibility to the finalized codes, and to ensure reliability of conducted research, inter-rater reliability was determined. In order to determine an inter-rater reliability score, a blank version of the coding chart was provided to the researcher's peer for assistance during the coding process. For this process, the peer was provided with a copy of interview transcriptions, compiled during both the initial and follow up interviews, and a list of finalized codes with definitions. The peer then conducted the

coding process; following this process, the inter-rater reliability percentage was determined. The inter-rater reliability percentage included the evaluation of ten out of twelve of the conducted individual interviews. An inter-rater reliability of 95.3% was determined through general consensus.

In order to provide evidence of triangulation among findings, the researcher collected findings from a series of semi-structured individual interviews, program database information, and reported GPAs. After the completion of data collection measures, the reliability of study results was ensured through repeated and consistent findings among students, which further supported the determined codes. The researcher sought to discover triangulation among data results by focusing on consistency of shared responses. Study validity was confirmed by ensuring that the findings represent and support the measurement of the posed research questions.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived impact of secondary education instruction, transition to college support, postsecondary education support programs, and informal support on the academic achievement among students with learning disabilities (LD). The sample size of the present study included six undergraduate students enrolled at one Midwest University. Student participants were also enrolled in an on-campus comprehensive program [Achieve Success] for students with disabilities. Through their enrollment in Achieve Success, students were provided with access to academic accommodations, as outlined in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and comprehensive, remedial-based services that fostered the development of academic independence. All six participants also were enrolled in and completed the Achieve Success six-week summer transition program prior to their first semester in college. Participant demographics, by pseudonyms, are provided in Table 3. In order to gain a better understanding of the background of each individual student, student portraits are provided to outline educational experiences related to engagement in support services in high school and college.

Table 3. *Interview Participant Demographics, by Pseudonyms*

Name	Gender	Age	Current Year	Time of Diagnosis	Diagnosis	College GPA	Academic Standing – past semesters
Lynn	F	19	Sophomore	High school	SLD, WD, ADHD, SD	3.198	GS
Rachel	F	18	Freshman	Elementary school	SLD, WD, SD	3.435	GS
Brian	M	21	Junior	Elementary school	WD, MD, ADHD	2.825	GS
Jack	M	20	Sophomore	High school	SLD, ADHD	1.846	GS: Fall '16 - Sp '17 Pro. 1: Fall '17
Chris	M	20	Sophomore	Elementary school	SLD	1.681	Pro. 1: Fall '16 Pro. 2: Sp '17 Pro. 3: Fall '17
Kyle	M	19	Freshman	Elementary school	Educational Autism	3.577	GS

Note. SLD = Specific Learning Disability, WD = Writing Disorder, MD = Mathematics Disorder, SD = Seizure Disorder, GS = good standing, Pro. = probation, Sp = spring.

Student Portraits

Lynn². Lynn is a 19-year-old undergraduate student at the University and is enrolled in the Achieve Success program. Lynn started receiving special education services in elementary school. In kindergarten, Lynn was diagnosed with a language impairment, and she received speech therapy services. At the end of first grade, Lynn was reevaluated and was diagnosed with Other Health Impairment with a specific Speech/Language Impairment. In 2004, Lynn was diagnosed with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), and in 2005 she was diagnosed with right

² All student names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants

hemiplegic cerebral palsy. It was not until high school that Lynn was diagnosed with Dyslexia and Dysgraphia; however, she received additional reading and spelling support throughout her academic career. Assessments revealed that Lynn was not reading at grade level by the third grade, so she transferred to a different elementary school in order to receive additional program support in the areas of reading and spelling. Lynn began experiencing seizures at the age of 11.

During middle school, Lynn was enrolled in specialized reading and math courses. During high school, Lynn received additional academic accommodations and supports, including: Orton-Gillingham tutor support during summer months, physical therapy (PT) and occupational therapy (OT) for cerebral palsy, and vision therapy. While in high school, Lynn utilized tutoring services, additional program support, support from teachers and the school's guidance counselor, and received additional support outside of the school system. Lynn shared that her high school supported college expectations and provided her with learning opportunities to prepare for college. When discussing her postsecondary transition experience, Lynn shared that she received transition support from her teachers, tutors, and counselors, and she relied on her parents as a significant support system while preparing for the transition to college. Lynn also relied on her parents, siblings, friends, peers, and high school organizations for informal support.

During the summer before her freshman year of college, Lynn attended the Achieve Success six-week summer transition program. The following fall semester, Lynn began taking courses at the University. During this time, Lynn began receiving academic accommodations and remedial support through Achieve Success. During her first

semester, Lynn completed an Organizational Tutoring course through Achieve Success. While enrolled in this course, Lynn met with an Organizational Tutor (OT) once a week and attended weekly workshops that covered topics related to advocacy development, disability disclosure, note-taking strategies, test-taking techniques, test anxiety, and campus life. The weekly meetings with an OT were individualized and were aimed at meeting Lynn's academic, social, and emotional needs. During the spring semester of her freshman year, Lynn also enrolled in the Advanced Multisensory Reading Strategies course, which was instructed by the program's Reading Specialist. This course provided a multisensory approach to reading and spelling while also covering comprehension strategies in relation to college-level material. While in college, Lynn utilized her academic accommodations, professors and tutors for academic support, Achieve Success support, and additional campus resources to meet her academic, social, and emotional needs. Lynn also relied on her parents, siblings, friends, peers, coworkers, and campus organizations for informal support. Lynn's academic achievement is outlined in Figure 2.

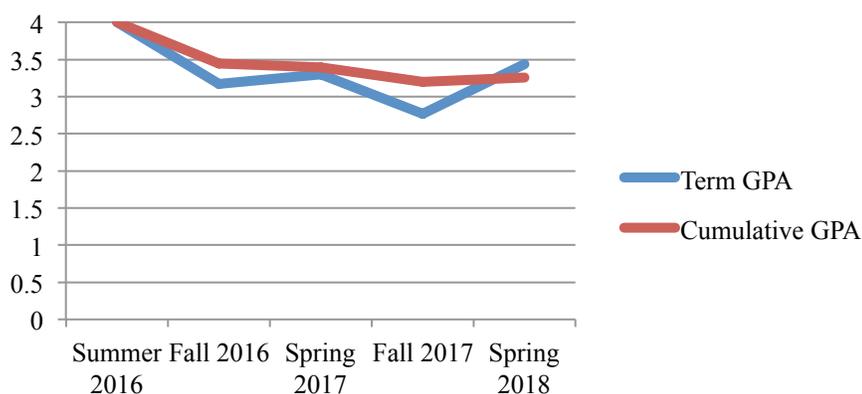


Figure 2. Lynn's Academic Achievement determined by semester GPA

Rachel. Rachel is an 18-year-old undergraduate student at the University and is enrolled in the Achieve Success program. Rachel was previously diagnosed with a specific learning disability and a seizure disorder. Rachel received special education services throughout her academic career. While in elementary school, Rachel was enrolled in the Barton System for reading and spelling support. After middle school, Rachel's family moved, so that she could attend a high school specifically geared towards students with LDs. While in high school, Rachel received special education services and worked with a mathematics and reading and grammar-based tutor outside of school. In high school, Rachel engaged in additional program support, the use of academic accommodations, assistance from teachers and counselors, and additional outside of school support, including counseling services. Rachel shared that her high school supported college expectations and provided her with learning opportunities to better prepare for college. While in high school, Rachel relied on her parents, siblings, friends, peers, and school clubs for support.

When discussing her postsecondary transition experience, Rachel shared that her high school provided transition-based courses geared toward developing the tools necessary to become successful learners in a college. She received transition support from her teachers, tutors, and counselors, and she relied on her parents as a significant support system while preparing for the transition to college. During the summer before her freshman year of college, Rachel attended the Achieve Success summer transition program. Once the following fall semester approached, Rachel began taking courses at the University. During this time, Rachel began receiving academic accommodations and

remedial support through Achieve Success. During her first semester, Rachel completed an instructional support course through Achieve Success. While enrolled in this course, Rachel met with a program staff member once a week and attended weekly workshops that covered topics related to advocacy development, disability disclosure, note-taking strategies, test-taking techniques, test anxiety, and campus life. The weekly meetings with a staff member were individualized and focused on meeting Rachel's academic, social, and emotional needs. Rachel chose to continue meeting with a program staff member on a weekly basis during the spring semester of her freshman year as well.

During her freshman year, Rachel also enrolled in the Advanced Multisensory Reading Strategies course, which was taught by the program's Reading Specialist, Kelly. This course provided a multisensory approach to reading and spelling and also explored a variety of comprehension strategies that could be applied to college-level material. Rachel shared that she enjoyed meeting with Kelly to discover new and beneficial ways to comprehend and learn course material. Rachel also felt that Kelly was a great support and advocate in making sure that her academic, social, and emotional needs were met. While in college, Rachel utilized academic accommodations, professors and tutors for academic support, Achieve Success support, and additional campus resources to support her academic, social, and emotional needs. In terms of informal supports, Rachel relied on her parents, siblings, friends, peers, and campus organizations. Rachel's academic achievement is outlined in Figure 3.

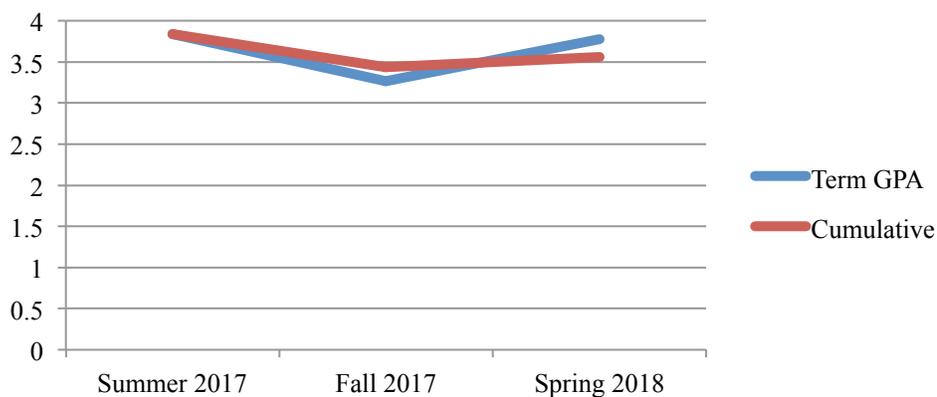


Figure 3. Rachel's Academic Achievement determined by semester GPA

Brian. Brian is a 21-year-old undergraduate student at the University and is enrolled in the Achieve Success program. Brian was previously diagnosed with a writing disorder, mathematics disorder, and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). When in elementary school, Brian received occupational therapy (OT) to improve his writing and fine motor skills. Brian also received additional early interventions for his writing disorder and ADHD in elementary school. Throughout his academic career, Brian received special education services. While in high school, Brian worked with an outside of school mathematics tutor and an overall content tutor that provided support in the areas of writing (scribe), reading, spelling, and grammar. Brian was enrolled in a college preparatory high school that fostered the belief of engaging students in learning opportunities aimed at better preparing them as future college students. Brian shared that his high school supported college expectations and provided him with learning opportunities to prepare for college. While in high school, Brian utilized academic accommodations, tutoring services, additional program support, support from teachers

and guidance counselors, and additional outside of school support, including counseling services.

In high school, Brian relied on his parents and siblings for support while in college he relied on a wider variety of informal supports, including: parents, siblings, friends, peers, coworkers, and campus organizations. When discussing his postsecondary transition experience, Brian shared that he received transition support from his program Director and guidance counselor and relied on his parents as a significant support system while preparing for his transition to college. During the summer before his freshman year of college, Brian attended the Achieve Success six-week summer transition program. The following fall semester, Brian began taking courses at the University. During this time, Brian began receiving academic accommodations and remedial support through Achieve Success. Brian utilized his academic accommodations and met with his professors to discuss course content, when necessary. While in college, Brian also utilized academic tutors, campus resources, and additional support services, including counseling. During his first semester, Brian completed an instructional support course through Achieve Success. While enrolled in this course, Brian met with a program staff member once a week and attended weekly workshops that covered topics related to advocacy development, disability disclosure, note-taking strategies, test-taking techniques, test anxiety, and campus life. The weekly meetings with a staff member were individualized and focused on meeting Brian's academic, social, and emotional needs. Brian's academic achievement is outlined in Figure 4.

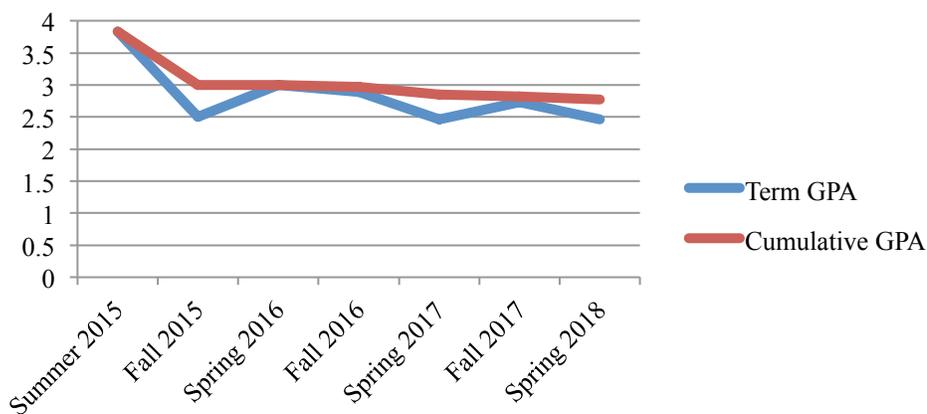


Figure 4. Brian's Academic Achievement determined by semester GPA

Jack. Jack is a 20-year-old undergraduate student at the University and is enrolled in the Achieve Success program. Jack received a late diagnosis of dyslexia and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) when he was 16-years-old. Although Jack recalled that he always struggled with reading, spelling, and focusing during class, he did not receive special education services. Jack did, however, receive reading remediation instruction while working with a reading specialist during second grade. Although he received remediation work at an early age, Jack continued to struggle with reading and spelling well beyond elementary school. It was not until his parents decided to have a neuropsychological evaluation conducted outside of the school system that they finally received answers. Even after the formal diagnosis, Jack did not receive special education services or mandated accommodations through the school system. As Jack recalls, although he did not have an official Individualized Education Plan, 504 Plan, or formal accommodations in high school, many of his teachers provided additional testing support

to meet his academic needs. While in high school, Jack relied on academic support from his teachers and additional outside of school support, including tutoring services. During high school, Jack relied on minimal informal supports. Although Jack relied on minimal supports, he recalled that his parents were a significant support system during this time. When discussing his postsecondary education experiences, Jack recalled that his high school did not offer transition to college-based courses, and that he did not receive transition support from any of his teachers, aids, or guidance counselors. Jack did recall, however, that his parents supported him during the transition to college experience.

During the summer before his freshman year of college, Jack attended the Achieve Success six-week summer transition program. The following fall semester, Jack began taking courses at the University. During this time, Jack began receiving academic accommodations and remedial support through Achieve Success. While in his first semester at the University, Jack completed an instructional support course through Achieve Success. While enrolled in this course, Jack met with a program staff member once a week and attended weekly workshops that covered topics related to advocacy development, disability disclosure, note-taking strategies, test-taking techniques, test anxiety, and campus life. The weekly meetings with a staff member were individualized and focused on meeting Jack's academic, social, and emotional needs. Similar to high school, Jack relied on his parents for guidance, but he also relied on support from his friends and peers while in college. At times, Jack struggled with utilizing his academic accommodations through Achieve Success. During his first academic year in college, Jack also struggled with advocating his needs to professors, utilizing campus resources to

support his academic needs, and seeking additional services to support his social and emotional needs. Jack's academic achievement is outlined in Figure 5.

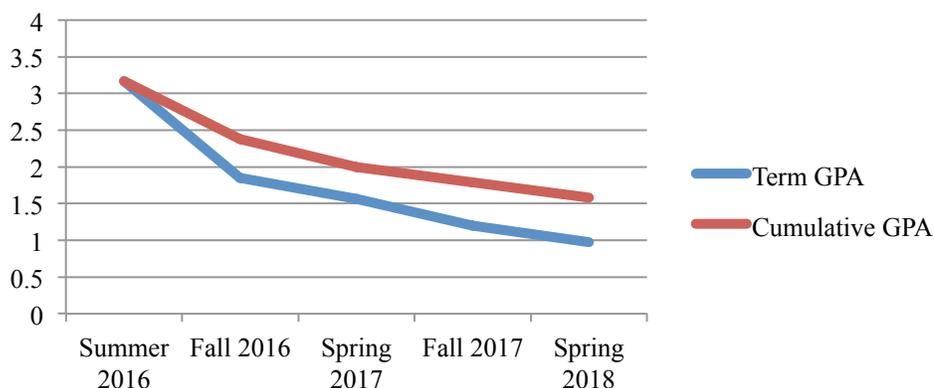


Figure 5. Jack's Academic Achievement determined by semester GPA

Chris. Chris is a 19-year-old undergraduate student at the University and is enrolled in the Achieve Success program. While in elementary school, Chris was diagnosed with a specific learning disability. He received speech and language support from kindergarten through ninth grade. In first grade, Chris worked with a reading specialist to further develop his reading skills. Throughout his academic career, Chris received special education services for support in literacy and written language. Throughout high school, Chris recalled struggling with focusing in his classes, short-term memory challenges, and processing information. While in high school, Chris worked with a one-on-one tutor on a daily basis, often after school. When discussing his previous preparation for college, Chris explained that his high school did not provide preparation for college-based instruction and did not support college-level expectations. Throughout high school, Chris utilized a wide variety of academic accommodations, including

extended time on out of class assignments and projects and modifications made to in-class quizzes and tests. On a daily basis, Chris was able to finish all homework assignments and projects before the end of the school day in Guided Study, which occurred during two hours of the school day. While in high school, Chris utilized tutoring support and additional academic support from his teachers. Although Chris recalled receiving postsecondary transition support from his tutor, he did not receive transition to college-based instructional courses or support from his mother during the transition period.

While in high school, Chris recalled that he did not rely on informal support systems. During the summer before his freshman year of college, Chris attended the Achieve Success six-week summer transition program. The following fall semester, Chris began taking courses at the University. During this time, Chris began receiving academic accommodations and remedial support through Achieve Success. At times, Chris utilized his academic accommodations, but experienced difficulty advocating for his needs and struggled with completing the proper procedures to ensure academic support. Chris also experienced difficulty utilizing his professors' office hours for additional support. In previous semesters, Chris did not utilize academic tutors, academic-based campus resources, or additional support services. In college, Chris relied on his friends and peers as support systems. During his first semester, Chris completed an instructional support course through Achieve Success. While enrolled in this course, Chris met with a program staff member once a week and attended weekly workshops that reviewed topics related to advocacy development, disability disclosure, note-taking strategies, test-taking

techniques, test anxiety, and campus life. The weekly meetings with a staff member were individualized and focused on meeting Chris' academic, social, and emotional needs. During his sophomore year in college, Chris continued to meet with his Organizational Tutor through Achieve Success for additional support. Chris' academic achievement is outlined in Figure 6.

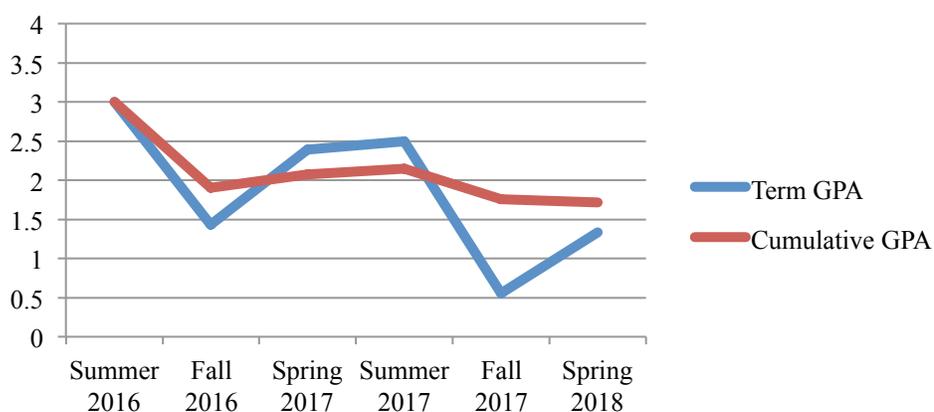


Figure 6. Chris' Academic Achievement determined by semester GPA

Kyle. Kyle is a 19-year-old undergraduate student at the University and is enrolled in the Achieve Success program. As a young child, Kyle received early intervention services and was diagnosed with pervasive developmental disorder. While in elementary school, Kyle was formally diagnosed with educational autism. Throughout elementary school, Kyle received speech and language services to further develop his expressive and receptive language skills. While in high school, Kyle received small group study support for 40 minutes a day and writing support for approximately one hour a week. When reflecting back on his high school experiences, Kyle recalled that the curriculum focused on preparation for college and provided instruction that supported

college-level expectations. Kyle recalled conducting research and setting deadlines with his case manager to prepare him for the higher-level demands of college. Kyle also felt the college-based English and AP History course that he completed in high school better prepared him for the academic demands of college. While in high school, Kyle utilized his academic accommodations, tutoring support, support provided from teachers and his case manager, and additional program support to aid in his academic success. Although Kyle's high school did not provide a transition to college-based course, he did receive transition support from his parents and case manager. While in high school, Kyle relied on his parents, siblings, friends, peers, and teammates as strong support systems. During the summer before his freshman year of college, Kyle attended the Achieve Success six-week summer transition program. The following fall semester, Kyle began taking courses at the University. During this time, Kyle began receiving academic accommodations and remedial support through Achieve Success. While in college, Kyle utilized his academic accommodations and would often visit his professors during office hours and attend course Supplementary Instruction (SI) sessions for additional support. Kyle also utilized campus resources and additional support services (counseling) to ensure his social and emotional needs were met. While in college, Kyle relied on his parents, siblings, friends, peers, mentor, and multiple campus organizations as support systems. While in his first semester at the University, Kyle completed an instructional support course through Achieve Success. While enrolled in this course, Kyle met with a program staff member once a week and attended weekly workshops that covered topics related to advocacy development, disability disclosure, note-taking strategies, test-taking techniques, test

anxiety, and campus life. The weekly meetings with a staff member were individualized and focused on meeting Kyle's academic, social, and emotional needs. Kyle's academic achievement is outlined in Figure 7.

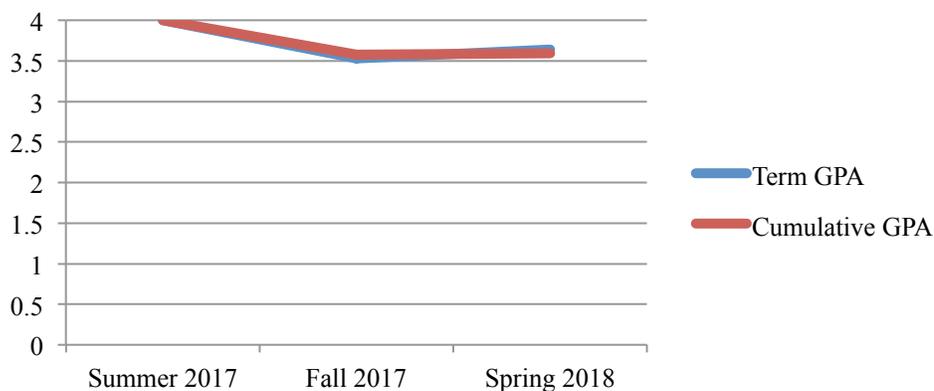


Figure 7. Kyle's Academic Achievement determined by semester GPA

Examining the Research

The present study incorporated a narrative-based qualitative approach to further examine the perceived impact of support services among students with disabilities. In order to provide student participants with an opportunity to *voice* their experiences and share the perceived impact of support services utilized throughout their academic journeys, the data collection method included a series of semi-structured individual interviews. Initially, the researcher designed the study to include a focus group that would occur after the completion of initial interviews; however, after the first round of interviews, the researcher decided to forego the focus group and instead conduct a second round of interviews with study participants. The researcher chose to conduct two rounds of interviews because the initial round of individual narratives included sensitive and

personal information, and the researcher felt students would feel more comfortable sharing their experiences if the interviews remained individualized and private.

Participants first engaged in an initial interview with the researcher; once the initial interviews were transcribed, the researcher analyzed the data and utilized the preliminary findings to develop themes and subthemes. To ensure reliable and accurate data, the researcher conducted member checks by providing participants with a transcription of their individual interview. Following the completion of the initial interviews, the same six participants engaged in a semi-structured follow-up interview. A final round of member checks were conducted by providing participants with a transcription of their follow up interview to ensure accuracy of findings. The interviews were then transcribed, analyzed, and coded. Findings from the follow-up interviews were used to further develop the determined themes and subthemes. To ensure reliability of data, blank transcriptions of both the initial and follow-up interviews were sent to a CITI certified peer to test inter-rater reliability. The researcher's peer reviewed the determined codes as they applied to the transcribed interviews, and the inter-rater reliability percentage was determined through consensus. The inter-rater reliability for the present study was 95.3%.

To further explore the impact of support services for students with disabilities, the researcher relied on students' perceived impact of services received throughout their secondary and postsecondary educational journeys. The research questions, along with themes and subthemes developed following participant interviews, were used to organize and present data in relation to support services, informal support, academic success, and

perceived levels of determination. The present study aimed to address the following research questions:

Do college students with LDs perceive the secondary transition curriculum and support services they engaged in as supportive to their college success?

Do college students with disabilities perceive informal supports as supportive and crucial to their academic, social, emotional, and environmental adjustment to postsecondary education?

Do college students with LDs perceive postsecondary support programs that focus on the development of self-advocacy, determination, and academic independence as supportive to their college success?

A thorough analysis of the findings revealed five major themes related to the overall impact of support services for students with disabilities:

- 1) Impact of an engaging, meaningful secondary education curriculum
- 2) Impact of postsecondary education transition support that focuses on college readiness
- 3) Impact of the use of postsecondary education support on academic achievement
- 4) Impact of informal support on academic achievement
- 5) Impact of the development and utilization of self-determination

Impact of an engaging, challenging secondary education curriculum

A major theme that was revealed throughout the current study was the influential impact of the secondary education experience and instruction on students' academic, social, emotional, and environmental adaptability to college. Through study findings, it was revealed that college-bound students significantly benefit from a high school curriculum that is academically meaningful, engaging, and geared toward preparation for college. While exploring shared experiences through narration and storytelling, the researcher aimed to further explore the impact of secondary education curriculum instruction on students' ability to adapt to the heightened levels of academic, social, and emotional demands experienced at the higher education level. The present study revealed a significant link between receiving an engaging, challenging, and meaningful secondary education curriculum on future academic success in college among students with disabilities. Four student participants shared that they received high school instruction that was geared toward college preparation while also receiving a heightened-level of academic expectations that closely aligned with the demands experienced in college, which positively impacted their ability to adapt to the college-level demands. When referencing the influential role her high school curriculum played on her ability to academically achieve in college, Lynn shared that her previous secondary education coursework provided her with a "reality check" that positively impacted her ability to adapt to college:

I would actually say my high school courses [really prepared me for college], starting from freshman year because it was this high school ... most highly ... I

would say highly competitive for academics. But high school is like, “Here’s a reality check. You’re going to go through harder classes than this in college, but we’re going to prepare you.”

Lynn shared that her high school provided a highly competitive curricular experience that better prepared her for the academic, social, and emotional demands of college. She further explained that her high school setting was “... basically a college, not a college-level quite yet, but it was like, this is the type of papers that they’re [college-level courses] expecting you to write ... and this is how they want you to do research papers.” Lynn explained that the high school she attended held high expectations that closely aligned with the demands of higher education. Through her high school curriculum, Lynn was able to engage in challenging instruction that provided her with the skills necessary to adapt to higher education learning. Lynn shared that her educational experiences in high school provided her with the opportunity to develop skills that aided in her postsecondary education transition and her ability to strive in a higher education setting. When referencing the impact of her upper level English course, Lynn stated, “a lot of people didn’t know how to do APA format, and then I looked at my high school paper, oh, this is how you do it. And then ... it was like a cake recipe for me.”

Rachel and Brian also revealed the beneficial impact their challenging, higher-level high school curriculum had on their ability to adapt to college level demands. Both Rachel and Brian participated in a partnership program with local higher education institutions that provided college-level instruction in a high school-based setting. Student interviews revealed the positive impact of college partnership programs on students’

ability to engage in effective self-advocacy skills and the ability to further develop college-based academic strategies. Rachel shared that her experiences in the partnership program laid the foundation for a smooth transition to college:

And that was how I transitioned. I had the support of my high school, but being able to come back and be like, “Okay. So this happened.” And I had a one-on-one kind of thing with one of my teachers and she helped me navigate how to study. Yeah. She helped me out with learning how to talk to my professor.

Similar to the experiences shared by Rachel, Brian also revealed that he turned to the Director of his high school support program for additional guidance, by sharing, “it was the people behind the program” that provided him with support throughout his high school experience. Brian shared, “I mostly relied on just my school’s program [for support]. And the head of our program ... if I had a problem with a teacher, which I rarely did, or if I needed some assistance, she was always there.” Brian revealed that the college-level course he enrolled in while in high school better prepared him for the academic demands of college by allowing him to further develop his writing skills prior to his enrollment in college. Brian also shared that engaging in an academically higher-level, challenging course also impacted his ability to gain independence:

I have to say the number one class [that better prepared me] is college writing because writing was, even in high school, writing was one of my weakest areas that still needed developing in addition to reading ... with writing it was a struggle especially when it came to essays. It was mostly just like I had the ideas but it was just hard getting it on paper and transcribing what I was trying to say from my

head onto paper. So I got a lot of support then. But then in college writing [college-based course], the techniques that my teacher taught really helped me improve my writing significantly to the point of, again, gaining independence.

When referencing the impact of her secondary education on the development of essential skills for success in college, Lynn shared that her high school curriculum held higher expectations, which better prepared her for college:

It [high school] was really geared towards setting you up for the right way in college, because their academic curriculum for high school, like, [my] high school's probably a little bit above average, I would say. Because they [teachers] gave you a lot of tests back to back to back, because in college you can't choose what time you want to go to the classes, and stuff like that, but in high school, it was like, here, you have six tests for one class, you gotta do more than others.

Lynn explained that the high school she attended provided her with the necessary instruction to further develop her self-advocacy skills when requesting academic support by stating, "It was hands-on and then they [teachers] taught you how to rely on your advisor if you're having issues, how to reach out whenever." Lynn further explained that her educational experiences in high school fostered the development of self-advocacy skills:

In some ways, like, in high school, some classes, you had to advocate for yourself, because they're not traditional classes, like baking. There was a culinary class that we had to take, a teacher can't really advocate for you with that, but you can say, with this type of test, I would like it to be read to me.

Similar to experiences shared by Lynn, Rachel felt that the high school she attended positively impacted her ability to develop and utilize self-advocacy skills when seeking support. When discussing self-advocacy development, Rachel shared:

My high school really pushed it [advocacy]. Especially one teacher that was like, “Your professor is not gonna come and sit next to you during class and be like, ‘Are you understanding this?’ They’re gonna be every man for themselves. You gotta tell your professors what your problems are. What you need help with, where you’re lost. Go to his office hours. Email him. Email him, email him, email him”. She drilled that into our heads.

When referencing the development of self-advocacy skills, Brian explained that his high school teachers encouraged the development of independence and the use of effective advocacy skills to ensure a successful postsecondary education transition. Brian explained that, “It was more like, ‘Oh, you didn’t do well, I don’t care.’ You got to self-advocate that to me, instead of having your parents email or something like that.” While many of Brian’s high school teachers encouraged the development of self-advocacy skills, he was also provided with educational experiences that encouraged maturity and a determined mindset:

His name was [Mr. Jacobs³]. Just as I look back on high school, I would thank the man, because he really was hard on us. And I like that, I like that about him, that he taught us how we should be taught. My senior year English teacher ... she was like, “No, you can’t do that, you can’t do that in college.”

³ Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of school administrators and personnel

Through these interactions in high school, Brian felt more prepared with writing college-level papers and “just being more independent.” Similar to experiences shared by Brian, Kyle shared that his high school curriculum positively impacted his developed of a strong sense of independence while in high school, “I think the high school atmosphere gave me that independence.” The present study revealed that students who entered college with a higher level of independence, and ability to engage in effective self-advocacy skills, were more likely to succeed academically than students who received minimal skill development instruction in high school.

During the interviews, Rachel shared the positive impact of attending a high school specifically geared toward teaching students with LDs. Rachel outlined that much of the curriculum was focused on self-advocacy, self-determination, and development of the necessary skills to become independent learners, which positively impacted her ability to adapt to the college environment:

I mean I had one teacher in high school that really ... especially right away in sophomore year, she'd be like, “This is not how its gonna be in college. You have to go to your professor. Your professor's not gonna come to you. They don't care. They don't really care at all. So you have to.” All that kind of stuff. That was really good. I love her. I absolutely loved her.

Rachel explained that the academic demands she experienced in high school closely aligned with expectations seen at the college-level. Along with providing the necessary tools to strive in a higher education setting, Rachel explained that her high school curriculum also provided her with the opportunity to further develop her note-taking

skills in order to become better prepared for fast-paced college lectures. While in high school, Lynn was able to learn techniques and strategies that could be applied in her future lecture-based courses in college:

Note-taking was a big one too ... especially with learning different note-taking [strategies] for different classes. Like, at first, at least at my school, we all got PowerPoints, we all got written out notes, and we just had to write little notes on the side. But then they slowly weaned us off of that, because every college is different. Some professors use PowerPoints and other professors are every man for themselves ... you have to write. And each teacher taught us how to do that ... they taught us to listen to what the professor is saying but not write down every single thing that the person was telling us. Write down the big details and using even the “At” symbol and not writing down “At” really helped a lot. Just messy notes but you would understand what they were talking about.

When discussing the impact of his secondary education curriculum on his academic success in college, Kyle outlined the influential impact of the college writing course he took in high school:

I have to say the number one class [that better prepared me] is college writing because writing was, even in high school, writing was one of my weakest areas that still needed developing in addition to reading ... with writing it was a struggle especially when it came to essays. It was mostly just like I had the ideas but it was just hard getting it on paper and transcribing what I was trying to say from my head onto paper. So I got a lot of support then. But then in college writing

[college-based course], the techniques that my teacher taught really helped me improve my writing significantly to the point of, again, gaining independence.

Kyle explained that this college-based English course provided him with the opportunity to further prepare for the academic demands of college by explaining, “it required a lot of outside commitment in terms of homework and everything ... college writing was the only thing that helped me prepare for, like, This is how you’re going to be writing papers and stuff [in college].” Although Kyle explained that the college-based course he completed in high school aided in the development of college-based readiness skills, he explained that the general education curriculum fell short when it came to preparing students for a higher-level of learning:

Most of the classes I took didn’t really ... emphasize, like, “Okay, this is what’s going to happen in college, versus, unlike here at the high school level, it’s going to be a completely different ballgame, my friend.” It wasn’t anywhere along the lines of that.

Although Kyle felt that his general education courses did not focus on outlining the differences between the academic demands of high school versus college, he did, however, take a course geared toward life after high school:

My employability skills class that I took my junior year of high school, that was a huge help to me, because it’s actually what helped me decide what I wanted to major in. When I was doing college research, it actually helped me narrow down to three of my top college choices ... and it’s been so beneficial.

Along with the instructional support Kyle received in his employability skills class, he also explained that his Study Skills course included instruction that was rooted in college preparation. “Sometimes we would work on certain skills that would be geared toward college and stuff like that.” When referencing the formal support he received from high school staff, Kyle outlined the impact of this type of support by sharing, “I grew really close to them [teachers]. And they kind of helped push me to actually major in geography. So a lot of support from faculty, and coaches, and aides, and stuff like that.”

Brian also shared that many of his high school courses provided instructional support that provided students with an opportunity to gain the necessary writing-based skills to achieve academic success in college. When discussing his previous writing-based courses, Brian explained that, “For most of my classes ... we were writing actually lengthy papers. We used every type of citation, so Chicago, MLA, APA, in all my classes, so we could learn how to adapt in college.” Brian also shared that during the completion of a psychology research paper, he learned the importance of formal writing and how his developed skills could be used in college:

We couldn't use the word “I” because we were writing a formal paper. That was the first time that was ever introduced, and I took that to heart. I'm like, okay, every time I'm doing a formal paper, I'm not going to use “I” because that's just going to probably be wrong, or I'm not going to get an A.

Brian also reflected on his experiences with previous high school teachers who he felt set high expectations to support the development of skills necessary for college-bound students:

My English teacher junior year ... would treat it [high school] like it was college ... he was really adamant on just being ... hard, but he was doing that for a reason.

I didn't think he was out to get us, personally. I respected him for that. I thought it was really excellent with kind of learning about how to apply this in college.

Personally, it's just yeah, you got to understand why they're doing it.

While Brian experienced a heightened level of academic demands from many of his previous high school teachers, he also recalled a teacher that had lower academic expectations, which had minimal impact on his academic success in college:

I had a chemistry teacher that was, I would say, a complete joke. He didn't, I mean he was a nice guy don't get me wrong, and he really cared about kids with learning disabilities, but he never prepared us for college. I can say I didn't learn a single thing.

Experiences shared by Kyle and Brian revealed the significant impact of a college readiness-based high school curriculum on students' ability to successfully transition to and achieve in college. Although many of Kyle's general education courses did not provide college-based preparation instruction, he did, however, receive this type of instruction in two of his elective courses, which included a college-based English course and an Employability Skills course. Brian also revealed a similar experience when referencing his experiences in a high school chemistry course by sharing that the teacher had low academic expectations and lacked the inclusion of preparation to college-based instruction, which negatively impacted his ability to further develop college-level academic skills. As shown throughout these shared experiences, many high school

curriculums lack the integration of college readiness and preparation instruction, including self-advocacy and self-determination development, which has played a negative role in students' ability to academically achieve and adapt to the higher-level demands of college.

Similar to Brian's experience in his high school chemistry course, Jack felt underprepared when he entered college, and he believed his high school curriculum could have done more to better prepare him for the demands of college. Although Jack felt he experienced a lack of college preparation instruction in high school, he outlined the additional support he received from his academic tutors and how that instruction impacted his academic success in high school:

I've had tutors most of my life outside of the school system. It was mostly for just things I needed help writing with, so if I had to write a paper for English or had to do something for history ... they would just help me so I didn't sound crazy.

Jack recalled that the additional academic support he received from his tutor allowed him to gain the necessary academic tools and strategies to be successful in high school.

Although the academic support Jack received from his tutors impacted his adaptability to academically succeed in high school, he felt that his high school lacked the necessary college preparation instruction to be successful in college. Jack shared that his lack of college-level academic skills impacted his ability to transition and adapt to the college demands:

I feel like it [postsecondary transition] could've been a lot better if I had someone that would've prepared me more to help me for the first few semesters, so I didn't have to figure it out once I got here [college].

When discussing the formal support he received in high school, Jack responded, "In high school, I don't know. I didn't really have any teachers or anything that helped me or counselors." Jack shared that he often felt confused when it came to utilizing services and requesting accommodations. Since he did not receive mandated accommodations while in high school, he felt that he struggled with the uncertainty of requesting additional support in college. The experiences outlined by Jack revealed the crucial impact of meaningful, engaging, and supportive academic support systems in high school. Similar to the lack of formal support in high school, Jack felt that the lack of crucial skill development necessary for success in college also negatively impacted his ability to adapt to the higher-level academic demands. Jack recalled that he received minimal instructional support that focused on the development of self-advocacy skills and independence. Although he felt his teachers discussed the idea of self-advocacy, he left his high school with a lack of confidence when it came to advocating for his needs, due to the lack of instruction in this area:

They never really taught us how to advocate for ourselves, they just told us we had to do it. They're like, "Your gonna have to advocate for yourselves in college." But then we're in high school and they didn't tell us how to do it or anything. I mean, I understood that it meant to advocate for yourself and talk to professors ... but I didn't know how to do it or what it meant to do, or what I was

supposed to say, or what they were gonna say back to me or what I was supposed to expect.

Initially, Jack also struggled with advocating for his academic accommodations once he entered college because he did not feel that he was equipped with the proper skills to request support. Jack explained that the self-advocacy expectations differed significantly from high school to college, which caused hesitation and confusion during his first semester:

The teacher would walk up to me during class and be like, "You can go to a different room." I'd be like, "All right. Sick." But now I have to get stuff signed for myself, and do it all, and so it's not hard but I wasn't ready for it.

In order to receive extended time on quizzes and tests, Jack's teachers would often stop by his classroom and ask if he would like to take the quiz or exam in a distraction-reduced room, or, according to Jack, "I guess my counselor emailed my teachers and told them, if they could, even though I don't have an IEP, give me some special accommodations." Jack felt that the uncertainty and confusion he experienced in high school impacted his ability to successfully transition to a college-based setting where self-advocacy was at the forefront. Similar to his feeling of under-preparedness in his ability to advocate for his academic needs, Jack also shared that he felt the academic skills he developed in high school needed to be modified in order for him to be successful in college:

I had to change everything when I came here [college] because in high school ... I was so unorganized ... I didn't do any of my stuff like I should have been. I had to

completely change that all when I got here to be successful. ‘Cause what I was doing in high school would not have gotten me very far here.

Ultimately, the lack of academic support received in high school negatively impacted Jack’s ability to navigate and adapt to the world of higher education.

The current study revealed the significant impact of a secondary education curriculum that is rooted in self-advocacy, self-determination, and necessary skill development in order for students with disabilities to succeed in college. Interview findings revealed that the lack of college preparation instruction in many of Jack’s high school courses negatively impacted his ability to adapt to the college demands, and ultimately, academically achieve at a higher level. Similar to experiences shared by Jack, Chris felt that the instruction he received in high school provided minimal transition to college support. He also felt that his lack of enrollment in higher-level courses negatively impacted his ability to adapt to college-level academic demands. Chris felt that the high school curriculum support he received was not academically challenging and failed to prepare him for the academic demands he experienced in college. Chris shared that, “The classes I took in high school, I think, were nothing like how it was here [college].” In addition, Chris explained how his high school curriculum impacted his success in college:

I wish I would have taken a harder class. To get me more prepared. Because what I kind of saw in college, it was harder. Maybe like just taking an honors class or something, just to see, how hard. And that’s something that I’ve never taken. So once I got to college, I saw that the classes were tough. It was kind of new.

Chris shared that he felt underprepared for the heightened level of demands that were placed on him in college. Chris recalled, “I didn’t have to work as hard in high school. I thought I would roll through college, but I kinda didn’t. It was harder.” When referencing experiences shared by Chris, it was revealed that a lack of college preparation instruction in high school negatively impacted his ability to transition and adapt to college-level demands. Although Chris felt unaware of the heightened level of academic demands in college, he felt that his tutor aided in his ability to advocate for his needs once he entered college. “During school, meeting with people through the speech program. We all used to talk about it. And going back to that tutor; she helped me advocate.”

Impact of postsecondary transition support that focuses on college readiness

The second theme present throughout the present research included the impact of postsecondary education supports that focus on college readiness instruction and college-level skill development, such as the Achieve Success summer transition program, on student achievement in college. Student narratives revealed that the support and instruction delivered during the Achieve Success summer program provided them with the necessary instructional tools to adapt to the college environment. Students also revealed that they benefited from the opportunity to live on campus during the summer program, and many shared that they felt more comfortable navigating the campus environment during their first semester in college because of their involvement in the summer program. Students also revealed that they benefited from starting their first semester of college with a strong GPA. When discussing Lynn’s experiences during the Achieve Success summer transition program, she shared a variety of ways in which the

program impacted her ability to adapt to college. Lynn explained that her involvement in the summer program provided her with the opportunity to become more comfortable accessing her accommodations and advocating for her needs:

I probably wouldn't have figured out that, "Oh, I have all these accommodations that I can use." If I didn't go, I don't think I would have utilized this [Achieve Success] much, and I wanted to have a 4.0 going into the semester. And that's why I can be lenient with my grades, where most people, they're starting with this ... you don't have a GPA. And then once you go into classes and if you start getting C's and D's, well then you're screwed for the next semester. But with ... graduating the summer program, I had close to a 4.0.

Lynn also revealed the impact the summer program had on her overall academic success by stating, "I don't think my GPA would be this high if I didn't have those booster classes during the summer." Lynn shared the influential impact the support of the summer program had on her ability to thrive in college by stating, "If my parents didn't make me go, I probably wouldn't have been where I'm at right now in this college."

When discussing the impact of the Achieve Success summer transition program on Rachel's ability to transition and adapt to the demands of college, she shared a variety of insightful experiences that played a role on her ability to academically, socially, and emotionally succeed. Rachel explained the importance of "just knowing" what to expect when she got to college was beneficial and aided in the success of her first semester:

If I didn't go to that summer program, I wouldn't have known anything. I mean I was full admit right at the start, but my parents were really pushing me towards to

go. And I think personally, I think almost every Achieve Success should do it, every Achieve Success student ... like I didn't know about how you can get tutors if you ask for it ... I mean all that kind of stuff. Just ... knowing. Exactly. That you know, that you can go in here [Achieve Success office] and just study. It's amazing, that summer program. Don't let it go.

Rachel also explained that the summer program provided her with the opportunity to start the fall semester with a strong GPA, and since it was a *transition* program, she shared that she was able to “mess up at the beginning” without negatively effecting her GPA. Rachel also revealed that the academic demands of the summer program provided her with a clear idea of what to expect in college:

Being able to mess up and not have it affect your GPA. Definitely [Art 105] class really helped a lot. Because a lot of us did mess up at the beginning, I messed up at the beginning. I messed up definitely, but he [professor] was able to help us fix that mistake. Yeah. My first exam, I did okay on it, but I think I got like a 74 on it and I was like, "Oops." And I ended up with an A-. And those Achieve Success classes, too ... like we had a set schedule and it was really tiring but I understand now ... why you guys packed our schedules. I ... Yup, I got it, this week, yup.”

While discussing Brian's perceptions in regard to his determined mindset, he explained that he often reflected on his peers' previous decisions and how those choices, good or bad, impacted their success during the summer program:

I think it [Achieve Success summer program] helped, definitely, with my first semester here. But I think it really showed me just no matter where you go, you're

going to meet people that definitely aren't going to make it through where you're at. I mean, going through the summer program I definitely saw some faces that I knew that I probably wouldn't see after my freshman year, because just knowing some of their habits, knowing some of the stuff that I knew that was going on. I felt like, yeah, I should probably get it together, yeah.

While Lynn shared that she gained a significant amount of knowledge regarding the academic, social, and emotional demands of college during the summer program, she also learned how to adapt to different living situations and how to better handle challenges that may arise. Lynn shared that her summer living situations taught her to be adaptable when she encountered difficult situations:

And then with having a roommate, that really taught me a lot really quickly because I would say she wasn't the greatest, but you're going to get that everywhere. So that was just a wake up call. So you just have to deal with it.

Rachel shared that having long, tiring days during the summer program aided in her preparation for the long and challenging days she experienced during her first semester of college. Rachel outlined that the higher-level academic demands of the summer program positively impacted her determination level:

I liked how sometimes it was very structured but it was a different structure every day. It wasn't the same thing every day, which was really cool. Good transition, definitely. But I think those long days actually helped us a lot. We have those long days ... I study 12-14 hours a day. Not, you know, straight, but you're up that long. You know, you go until you're done.

She also felt that the summer program provided instruction that closely aligned with the many academic differences between high school and college, including expectations, responsibilities, and advocacy. She explained the importance of engaging in instruction that outlined the differences between high school and college and the importance of adapting to those changes:

And seeing what kind of stuff you need to cut off from high school. "You can't do this anymore [like] in high school. You have to do this in college". The program staff really helped. [Josie and Mara], that class [Transition to College] we took? I learned a lot from that.

Brian shared that the summer program provided him with the opportunity to further explore both the social and academic demands of college:

When the staff taught transitioning, I thought it was going to be the social aspects of it. But you guys were like, "No, this is how you talk to the professors properly, this is how you properly send an email." Very good advice, but definitely, with helping with living with people for the first time, I met my first roommate there, [Joey⁴], got to see his flaws, he got to see my flaws. We lived with each other our freshman year, and some of those kids on our floor at the summer program, very great people. I think a lot of the people that are still here, just great people.

Brian also explained that without the summer program he felt he would have struggled with adjusting his mindset to properly navigate the academic demands of college, "... I

⁴ Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of university students

feel like the summer program got me in the right mindset of college.” He also recalled his initial thoughts regarding the summer program courses:

And then here, the staff told us, first thing, "We're not going to accept you guys into college if you screw up." So I'm like, oh, shoot. I'm going to have to actually take this seriously. And I started doing all my homework.

Similar to experiences shared by Brian, Lynn and Rachel explained that the summer program aided in their ability to successfully navigate the campus environment.

Lynn outlined that the summer program provided her with a hands-on experience and an opportunity to further explore campus:

Kind of everything in general [aided in the transition process], like how the campus works... they taught us ways to navigate it more quickly, and how to organize yourself. And how to be responsible... you can't have your parents come to college and wake you up.

Rachel shared that being provided with the opportunity to explore the University positively impacted her ability to adjust to the college environment. Rachel went on to explain, “The Summer Program was amazing. Learning how to navigate the University. Because that's a big step, getting lost. A lot of us got lost the first week.” Rachel shared that the summer program had a lasting impact on her ability to successfully navigate the world of higher education. Jack also noted that choosing to not attend the summer program would have made the transition to college a difficult one:

I knew the campus a lot better. It was nice being able to know where I was going on the first day.

Kyle explained that the summer program allowed him to experience the academic, social, emotional, and environmental differences between high school and college. Kyle felt that the summer program positively impacted his ability to experience a smooth transition during his first semester in college:

It [Achieve Success Summer Program] definitely impacted me in a positive way, because they helped me familiarize the online systems, like, saying, "Oh, this is where professors are going to post their content, and this is the syllabus. Or you might have to send papers here, or do online quizzes and stuff like that." And the situation was pretty much similar to the Art 105 course. Like, there was going to be a lot of expectations, a lot of outside time to work. And it just, for me, it kind of gave me a better head start than my other peers in my graduating class.

Overall, Kyle shared that his involvement in the summer program positively impacted his college experience:

But looking back now, I definitely thought that attending the summer program was the best choice of my life thanks to my parents and thanks to the program staff. Because if I didn't attend that, then I probably wouldn't be as successful as I am now. Or I could not have been successful without that support, or without having that experience that the program staff provided.

When discussing the Achieve Success summer program, Jack explained that although the summer program was academically different, in some ways, than college, the support and instruction he received positively impacted his ability to transition to college:

It's [college] a little bit more tough than what I saw at Achieve Success [summer program], but it was a lot nicer to have. It would have been a lot harder just going straight from high school to the stuff I have to do now. It's nice to have Achieve Success so I could do that. We were with the same students every day, so it wasn't fully college, but it was nice to have that transition classes to get me here.

Jack also shared the importance of getting to know program staff and understanding how to access accommodations and support in college:

'cause we get to know everybody ... all the people here who can help, so it was really nice being able to know their names and stuff, so I wouldn't have to try to come here in the first semester and try to meet everybody..."

Although Jack received a lack of instructional support in high school, he noted that the support he received from Achieve Success positively impacted his ability to adapt to the challenging academic, social, and emotional demands of college:

I think it was probably Achieve Success [that impacted my transition], 'cause I didn't really spend a lot of time in high school getting ready. I was mostly just spending time trying to catch up, so I didn't have time to really get ready for what college was gonna be like and the classes and stuff.

Chris recalled that the summer program provided him with the opportunity to engage in campus life and a variety of experiences that allowed him to further explore the University and the available campus resources. When discussing the impact of the summer program:

I would say the summer program [prepared me for college], because it just got me started early. Before the fall, earlier than the other freshman. I feel like it prepared me so once I went into the fall I knew what it was gonna be like.

Chris outlined that the summer program courses also provided him with a better understanding of the heightened level of academic demands in college. Chris recalled his experience writing a research paper for his writing course during the summer program:

Yeah, the first research paper. I feel like I didn't put a lot of thought in on it. And then I got a lot of feedback on it. That's when I was like, "Okay, maybe I need like extra help and stuff." And when I didn't do good on my first art exam, that's when I thought, "Okay, I need to study more. This isn't like high school. You need to cover your notes and figure things out."

Chris shared that, overall, the summer program provided him with realistic expectations of what he experienced during his first semester in college. Chris explained that he felt a variety of factors impacted his preparation for college, by sharing, "I think everything helped prepared me for fall semester. Just like the specific classes that I took, it kinda helped me for the classes that I took in the fall. I just kinda knew what to expect going in."

Many of the student participants shared that the Achieve Success summer program impacted their overall academic achievement and played a significant role in their ability to adapt to the academic, personal, and environmental changes experienced at the higher education level. A majority of the student participants also shared that the summer program aided in the development and utilization of self-advocacy skills, which

is crucial for success in college. More specifically, Lynn revealed that her involvement in the summer program allowed her to become more comfortable advocating for her needs to program staff. Lynn further explained, “I felt more comfortable rely-not relying on them, but reaching out to them. Like, ‘Hey, I’m struggling in this class. Can I drop it? Or what are my options? Like, can you help me work out this schedule?’” Rachel explained the importance of taking the summer program “seriously” and how this impacted her ability to advocate for her needs:

But definitely, the Achieve Success summer program really helped me a lot because being able to get that help. Like understanding what Achieve Success can do with it. Especially if we take it seriously. I don't know, some kids didn't take it seriously, but I took it seriously. And being able to get help ... The art class that we took was a really good start at our classes because it worked with everyone's prereqs., too.

When discussing his experiences through the Achieve Success summer transition program, Brian shared that the program staff required students to self-initiate and advocate for their needs. “The Achieve Success staff were definitely a lot more, you're doing it on yourself, but they still had a big helping hand ... and just was a taste of what college was really going to be like.” Brian shared that although the program staff encouraged students to utilize their supports available through Achieve Success, he struggled with advocating for his needs while still utilizing a strong sense of independence:

Probably the Achieve Success' sense of, okay, you gotta initiate. Initiation or just getting in that swing of things. That's probably my favorite aspect of Achieve Success because [they] weren't holding our hands. I think more so, over the summer program, because [they] required us to go into meet with [them] for questions, and I had no interest in doing that because I just wanted to be more independent for myself.

Chris also explained that the summer program provided him with an opportunity to actively engage in self-advocacy with college-level instructors: "It [transition] would've been a lot harder if I didn't have at least one professor I had to talk to and advocate myself with, and the blue sheet sign and everything." Unlike experiences shared by Chris, Jack explained that he experienced a sense of confusion and uncertainty with advocating for his needs in college because of the different academic environment. Jack felt that the lack of self-advocacy development in high school played a negative role in his ability to utilize this skill in college. Although Jack shared that he was able to further develop his independence skills during the summer program, he struggled with finding a healthy balance between advocacy and independence:

Yeah, I think so because ... I mean, it was just so different coming in in the fall from everything else. But the summer program got me more okay with being able to advocate for myself and everything, which was nice. I didn't do any of that in high school. I did everything by myself. I didn't like to ask for help, even if I needed it, which was bad, but I wanted to do everything by myself. I'd just go into

my room after school, and I would just spend the whole night in there doing my own thing. Not asking for help or anything from my parents, even if I needed it.

While Jack was able to further develop his independence skills during the summer program, he experienced difficulty adjusting to the college environment and properly balancing his newfound independence and heightened need for self-advocacy:

being more independent was definitely different for me. I think I was thinking I could do it by myself mostly. Then, I think I was kind of doing it on my own, which affected me because I didn't really use anybody to help me because I was pretty independent about my stuff. It got bad, I guess, 'cause I needed the help but I didn't get it.

Along with the self-advocacy and independence instructional support received during the summer program, many students revealed that the program aided in the development of crucial academic skills necessary for success in college. Along with developing appropriate self-advocacy skills, Lynn shared that the summer program provided her with an opportunity to explore and develop college-level strategies that aided in her ability to prioritize and manage time:

And it [Achieve Success summer program] taught me, when you have a big research paper, don't save it until last minute. Break it up into days. Do a page a day and then you're good. Some people would wait until last minute. You're not going to get the grade you want if you do that. It's just not going to happen. I need to organize. I need to do multiple subjects all in one day, pretty much every day... in college, you're like, "Oh, here is ... you have 13 credits worth of credits worth

of courses. So you have four to five classes. You got to do a bit of homework in each of them every day. You got to write out what you're going to do.

Rachel shared that the academic support she received in high school also impacted her ability to academically succeed in the summer program, however, she explained that she was able to learn additional strategies and skills during the summer program that aided in her academic abilities and success in future semesters:

A lot of what the summer program did, my high school was teaching me at the same time. That was really good, but I remember one thing was learning how to use commas and semi-colons. That was a big thing because my high school did it but I was still like man ... but I remember that one being a big one. And I'm really happy that happened.

Rachel also recalled the importance of learning how to properly write and address an email in college, which positively impacted her ability to adjust:

Being able to know how to write an email too. That was a big one. Being able to make sure that you have your student ID number underneath your name, that was a big one. Because I didn't know that you had to do it.

When sharing his perceived impact of the summer program, Kyle shared:

It [Achieve Success summer program curriculum] was more like an actual, "Okay, this is what the class would look like," and just the expectations of a professor and everything like that. I knew right off the bat ... like, about a week into the summer program, academically there's a lot more you have to do *outside* of class instead of *in* the class.

Kyle also shared that the summer program positively impacted his motivation to succeed and his ability to adjust to the demands of college:

But it definitely motivated me to become successful for the fall semester, to start off on a good start. Which it has. I mean, my GPA is really good right now. And it also just helped me with time management, because I was able to experiment, like, "What organizations or clubs can I be involved in? Which ones would work on my time?" And I had to drop some because it was affecting, not necessarily my academic performance, but my time to focus on academics. So it just gave me time to adjust.

Chris shared that although the summer program provided him with the opportunity to better understand the importance of time management, priorities, and the campus environment as a whole:

Just knowing going into the fall, I had already known. Summer classes and stuff. I knew, just preparing and stuff, and being time consuming. You gotta get to this class and stuff like that. I knew where the library was and stuff. Just put me on a schedule and stuff like that. I guess like a different schedule from high school and college. Just the homework assignments and stuff like that. Just getting prepared for when that fall '16 was coming.

While many students explained the positive impact of college-level academic skill development in college, many participants also shared the importance of developing a strong support systems among their peers during the summer program. Lynn recalled that she gained a support system in the friends she met over the summer months. She recalled,

“Even though the summer program wasn’t great with the roommate, like, I still got along with the other ones, and I knew that they were coming back [to college], so I already had like a little mini friend group.” Jack also explained the importance of being able to meet friends and gain a sense of belonging over the summer program:

Yeah. I think it [Achieve Success summer program] helped me get here, get myself more mentally prepared, being able to just meet some people and then start the school year with them, 'cause I didn't know anybody from my school going here, so I would have been just completely lost right away if I didn't have a small group of people that I knew well.

Chris also shared that the summer program encouraged him to meet new friends and interact with other students, “Socially, just meeting new people. That really helped.”

Impact of the use of postsecondary education support on academic achievement

A third theme that appeared among the present research was the impact of college support services on academic achievement. All student participants shared that the support received from Achieve Success aided in their ability to further develop necessary college-level skills and adapt to the college environment. It was found, however, that in order for students to become integrated within the University and academically successful, they must commit to the ‘plan of action’ established with their Achieve Success Organizational Tutor (OT), and they must utilize effective determination skills to persevere through academic and personal hurdles. Although all participants shared that the additional support they received through Achieve Success positively impacted their college-level skill development and acclimation to college, two students revealed that a

lack of motivation and ineffective decision-making skills negatively impacted their ability to utilize college-level skills and, ultimately, academically succeed at the higher education level.

When providing insight into her experiences with Achieve Success as a support system in college, Lynn shared that the staff of the program provided her with the necessary tools to aid in her academic success in college. Lynn recalled the impact of the support she received from Mara, an Achieve Success staff member:

[Mara] gave me the tools. Like here's a planner, write out each block to study for an hour or so for each subject. Especially freshman year but now it being sophomore year, you got into the groove. [Mara] kinda helps smooth everything over.

Lynn explained that the program encouraged her to practice academic independence techniques by providing her with the necessary instruction and support to further develop the skills necessary to properly advocate for her needs:

I try to be as independent as possible, but I'm not going to be afraid to tell the professor, "I have this, x, y, and z. You got to help me out. And this is where Achieve Success really helped me, too, and that's why my parents and I drew to this campus because of the academic support.

While in college, Rachel was also enrolled in an additional reading remediation course that provided one-on-one instruction from the program's Reading Specialist. Rachel shared that this course enhanced her study skills and note-taking abilities:

She has taught me how to utilize ... Last semester, I didn't want to use Quizlet. I'm kind of kicking myself now that I should have used Quizlet. But she's help me to ... like, "When you start reading, you should read the summary first ... she just helped me a lot with that situation. And just learning how to take the proper notes. You guys helped us out in the summer but she really enforced that, "Don't write down every single vocab word you see. Write down the main topics ... Like, if there's a heading, write down the heading and then put three main points of that heading.

Rachel also felt that the instruction and support she received from Achieve Success directly impacted her time management, planning, and organization skills:

I'm really good at really thinking through my days. I have it all on my phone and really making sure that this is study time, you have to study here. This is, "Oh, we could hang out with my friends here. Take 2 hours off and hang out with my friends". And making sure I have those set times for tutoring because I know when I'm going to study during that time. Achieve Success helped me out a lot with that.”

Overall, Kyle shared that his involvement in Achieve Success has provided him with access to a campus-based support system where he feels comfortable addressing and discussing his academic, social, and emotional needs:

Achieve Success has definitely helped me with time management, learning to manage my time when it comes to academics, and just how to cope when there's a lot of things due at one time, and coping with the stress level and everything. But

also at the same time, too, like, learning how to balance when to work, and then being social, and just having fun. And just exploring your new freedom.

Jack also outlined that the support he received from his Organizational Tutor encouraged him to further develop his time management and planning skills. Jack shared that during the semester he and his Organizational Tutor would create a master schedule that outlined his semester courses, mandatory meetings, study times, personal time, and athletic involvements. Jack shared that this mechanism aided in his ability to stay on track during the semester:

I think having a schedule that is fairly detailed. When I go to class, when I study and do all my stuff. That's nice, 'cause I can just look at that and be like, "This is where I need to be and when." Then I can just look at my planner and be like, "Alright, so this is what I have to study right now.

Rachel also recalled the importance of learning to work through challenging situations and making difficult decisions and how that support impacted her academic success in college:

[Josie] kind of did with the individual OT where she didn't make all the decisions for me. We both talked it through and I learned how to think through, "Is this the class I want to take? How will my disability affect this class? How will my disability help out with this class? Talking it out loud. Not just in my head but actually physically talking out loud.

Rachel explained that her OT, Josie, also impacted her ability to see the "big picture" in college, "[Josie] helped put things in perspective a lot and maybe I shouldn't be focusing

on this too much, just try to focus on that a little bit more as that's the big picture, not the little stuff.” Rachel also recalled that it was beneficial to have her OT to reach out to for a variety of questions and concerns with the opportunity to also seek supportive guidance and advice. Although Rachel was only required to meet with her OT during her first semester at the University, she requested to continue these meetings during the spring semester of her freshman year because of the positive impact the additional instruction, support, and guidance had on her academic achievement in college:

Like [Josie]. I mean I didn't have to do OT again, but I think if I didn't have OT, I wouldn't ... I don't know. I can build up those questions in my head and be like, "Okay. [Josie] can help me with this. Like I would have never met [Jacky] [academic support], if I hadn't learned about her from [Josie] because you helped me a lot last semester for dropping that class. She's awesome.

Along with receiving support, Brian shared the importance of receiving guidance and advice from his OT and the impact this type of support had on his ability to succeed in college:

I think it was just through Achieve Success and having a hand through my family that really supported me. I mean I thought that having my appointments with [Nikki] really helped me out, especially just kind of like chit chatting and just kind of understanding more, like how I can do something or just like if something bad occurs, I can always go to her and she can always give advice. She's probably heard it all. You guys probably definitely heard everything.

When referencing the support Brian received through Achieve Success, he recalled the positive influence these interactions had on his ability to become academically independent while being able to continue developing and utilizing effective self-advocacy skills:

[Nikki], Achieve Success staff member, was always incredibly helpful, and she's probably been one of the most helpful people. She was my OT instructor. But [Nikki] was my go-to person since she helped me with math, helped me realize ... I can always ask for help, but she was always really good with making us independent. She was always adamant about that. I really admire that quality.

Jack recalled his previous college experiences by outlining the ways in which the Achieve Success program assisted him throughout his college experience. Jack shared that he would often put off looking up his grades for fear of realizing he was not doing well, however, during the weekly OT meetings he was held accountable to look up his grades and track course progress:

Yeah, that's nice because they [OT] check our grades and everything, so I can't avoid doing that, and then it helps me stay on top of my stuff a lot more and we use the planner. It's helpful ... she [OT] usually just helps me with figuring out staying on top of my stuff, so I ... can stay ahead of the game.

Jack also outlined that the support he received from his OT encouraged him to further develop his time management and planning skills. During the semester, Jack and his OT would create a master schedule that outlined his semester courses, mandatory meetings,

study times, personal time, and athletic involvements. Jack shared that this mechanism aided in his ability to stay on track during the semester:

I think having a schedule that is fairly detailed. When I go to class, when I study and do all my stuff. That's nice, 'cause I can just look at that and be like, "This is where I need to be and when." Then I can just look at my planner and be like, "Alright, so this is what I have to study right now."

Although Jack applied the skills he learned during his OT meetings, he did not utilize his academic accommodations for many of his college courses, "Yeah, there were some semesters I didn't really use it [academic accommodations], because I didn't think I needed it, but I did." Jack explained that his plan for the future includes developing a positive, determined mindset and stronger self-advocacy skills, "It was kind of a mindset. I gotta try and I actually gotta do well, and then starting to advocate for myself more and more." Jack shared that during his first semester in college, he also experienced challenges with finding a healthy balance between his academics and social life:

I was pretty social because it was my first time meeting a whole bunch of new people, since I had been in high school with those same people for four years. I tried to stay focused on schoolwork, and I did, but I spent a lot of time outside too.

Jack explained that during his freshman and sophomore year, his social life took precedence which negatively impacted his academic performance in many of his courses, however, Jack further explained that he was working on challenging his mindset by becoming more determined and motivated to succeed during future semesters in college,

“Yeah. Before I didn't want to go to class or anything, but now I'm determined to go to class, 'cause you can fall behind so quick if you don't.”

When discussing Chris' involvement in Achieve Success, he revealed that during his first few semesters of college, he often lacked the self-initiation and motivation to engage in positive academic changes. Chris experienced a lack of involvement in the classroom during his first few semesters in college, and his grades reflected that. Chris explained, “I feel like at first, I wasn't putting in enough time into the classroom. After wrestling practice, I didn't study enough.” Chris shared that he felt his lack of involvement impacted his ability to achieve academic success during his freshman and sophomore year of college:

Oh yeah, that [OT] helped out a lot. Just keeping me on schedule and making sure I know what's going on during the weekend and stuff. I know it's helping out a lot now, but at first, we went over good stuff, but I felt like once I left the meeting, I kind of didn't follow up on things that we talked about. That kind of hurt me a little bit.

Chris also explained that his lack of self-advocacy and minimal use of support services negatively impacted his ability to become academically successful in college. Chris revealed, “I feel like that was just like difficult [first semester of college], and I could have done better. I should have just got a tutor to help me out that first semester.” Chris felt that the use of content tutors in all of his courses would have positively impacted his academic performance. Chris' lack of involvement and participation in courses also negatively impacted his course grades. When discussing his plan for change in the

upcoming semesters, Chris explained that his main goal is to enhance his self-advocacy skills:

When I didn't speak up in those classes, I wouldn't get the grade that I wanted because I wouldn't ask the professor for clarification, "What do you mean by this?", "Can you post the notes online?", "Can you reset this question on a line course?" I noticed that whenever I didn't speak up, I wouldn't get the grade so I decided to speak up a little more and I felt like my grades started going up. So I will continue self-advocating for myself.

While Chris felt he could rely on the Achieve Success program for additional support in college, he felt his lack of drive and focus had a negative impact on his academic success during his first few semesters of college:

I think maybe I lost focus. I wasn't paying enough time to my school and stuff. Maybe I was like focused more on sports and stuff. I should have got tutors and stuff like that. That's what I'm thinking. It was just myself, I should have made that change. I feel like I had it in the back of my head. But I didn't end up doing anything about it. I ended up being lazy, kinda.”

Chris shared that his lack of exam preparation and minimal engagement with campus resources also played a negative role in his academic achievement:

In one of my classes, Radio, TV, Film, it wasn't a very hard class, but the reason I think I did not do well was because it was a lot of notes and stuff, but later on after writing down the notes I didn't go back and review them and that kinda hurt

me a little bit, hurt the grade. Out of I think four exams, I only took two exams in Achieve Success, and I think I should have taken all four there.”

Although a few participants shared a lack of drive and motivation when it came to their first few semesters in college, many of the students shared that the support they received from the Achieve Success program positively impacted their ability to develop and utilize necessary self-advocacy and self-determination skills and academically achieve in college. Lynn revealed that the support she received from Achieve Success impacted her overall ability to better navigate the demands of college and had a positive impact on her overall GPA:

It [Achieve Success] really helped me with organization and utilizing my accommodations. Because I don't think I would have this GPA if I never heard of this college or had the academic support I did. I don't know where I would be without this [Achieve Success], practically.”

While Lynn recalled the importance of utilizing her developed self-advocacy skills, she also shared that she felt the program was a significant support system. She felt that she could rely on the program when a challenging situation arose or when she was faced with a difficult situation. Lynn shared, “And even with everybody [Achieve Success staff] else, they're really supportive there. They help ... they try to help whenever.” When discussing the impact that Achieve Success had on Rachel's ability to navigate the demands of higher education, she recalled the positive influence of the significant amount of support she received from program staff:

“Last semester, it was amazing. You know how much I went to [Josie] last semester. I don't think I would have ... Who knows what could have happened, if I didn't have Program Success ... Just the Dean of Students, it's not the same. Definitely not the same. I've actually just popped in at [Mara's] office so many times. And I'm like, "Gosh. Help me!" And if they don't know they can like lead you ... to someone else that knows.”

Kyle shared that his enrollment in Achieve Success provided him with peace-of-mind and a sense of reassurance because he had a strong support system right on campus. Kyle explained that his enrollment in the summer program provided him with the opportunity to build strong working relationships with program staff and instructors. Kyle shared that just “having an outlet” was crucial to his success in college:

Again, it's [Achieve Success] impacted me positively. I'm kind of glad that I was ... during the program to have already a connection with you guys, like, have already faculty staff support, getting to know you guys personally before college would start. Because I feel like if there was a situation that I wasn't maybe aware of in college, that you guys in person, like, I could talk to you guys about it.

Brian revealed that, at times, he would struggle with remaining academically independent while also continuing to advocate for his needs when he encountered challenging roadblocks. However, Brian felt that the support he received from Achieve Success successfully aided in his ability to remain independent while also being able to seek support, when needed:

I always like to use Achieve Success as a last resort instead of dealing with it.

And I feel like that's how you guys brought us up, where we got to deal with our own issues, and then you guys are there for a pillow or some comfort to know that I'm not in this alone, and that's always been a great feeling.

Brian also shared that the academic, social, and emotional support he received through Achieve Success support had a positive impact on his success in college:

He was so helpful. I love that guy to death. He's one of ... I look up to the man. He's really been a great mentor. I don't go and talk to him about school stuff, but he's always ... Especially ... Sophomore year was a difficult year for me because dealing with Greek Life and then dealing with just emotional and school. Because my classes were starting to ramp up. I felt like he was always such a good relief. And then [Nikki] was always helpful with talking to and saying, "Hey, I'm having a really hard time with this class" and she would be like, "Okay, I know that a lot of people have struggled with this class, but here's something that you can do." Or "Okay, I can always look over this paper" or something like that. She was always very helpful. And [Jim] was really good for emotional support, even though we would talk for three hours.

Brian explained that his involvement in Achieve Success encouraged him to establish a healthy balance between academic independence while continuing to utilize his developed advocacy skills in order to ensure his academic and personal needs are met.

Impact of informal support on academic achievement

The fourth theme revealed by the present study included the influential impact of informal support on academic achievement among students with disabilities in college. Study findings revealed that an increased level of informal support positively impacted students' ability to persist and achieve academic success in college. Study findings also noted that students with reportedly higher levels of campus involvement also experienced a higher level of academic success in college. A majority of study participants also revealed that the informal support they received through parents, siblings, friends, peers, and teammates largely impacted their ability to persist through challenging academic and personal experiences and positively impacted their ability to obtain a higher level of academic success in college. The present study also revealed a link between the informal support received in high school and during the postsecondary transition phase on students' ability to successfully transition to college.

When discussing Lynn's previous engagements with informal support systems, she shared that she relied on multiple support systems throughout both high school and college. Lynn recalled the importance of her friends' support while in high school:

Well, especially my friend group in high school [was supportive], they didn't go if I couldn't go out every weekend, they knew that, "Hey, you have this. You've got to do what you have to do ... and if you need my help, reach out. If you're stressed and just can't figure out something, you can rely on me to help you."

While Lynn's friends were an influential form of informal support in high school, she also relied on her parents, siblings, peers, and organization-based support. Similar to

experiences shared by Lynn, when referencing the impact of informal supports during her high school years, Rachel shared that her parents were really the driving force behind her determination to succeed in school:

Both of my parents were [supports], but it was really my dad and I that really did it. My mom was there for most of the driving and getting my spirits up before the tutoring, but my dad was really behind the scenes. Really getting everything in order.

While Rachel saw her parents as a significant support system, she also shared that her determination mindset and motivation to succeed also impacted her academic achievement in college:

But it was also me too. I'm not gonna give all of the credit to my parents because I actually listened to what they were telling me and was like, "Yeah, I need to work on that." I'm pretty proud of myself for that one.

When reflecting back on the support she received from her parents, Rachel recalled, "My parents really pushed me a lot, but I can see some of the kids didn't have those kind of parents that I had."

When referencing the support systems Brian relied on in high school, he shared, "My parents [were supportive]. I had a tutor, scribe, everything, since my dysgraphia, but mostly just tutors. I had one for math and just one that would scribe stuff for me and help with grammar." Brian recalled that in order to be successful in high school, he relied on the academic support he received from various tutors and scribes. Although Brian worked

closely with tutors for academic support, he relied heavily on his parents and siblings for emotional and social support:

Maybe my dad [instilled determination], but more ... not a word thing. It's just who he is as a person, always left a mark on me. My mom was always like, "Why are you stressing out so much? Why do you have to feel like you have to always do that? Why do you feel like you're never good enough for doing that? You are. You could just lighten up".

Along with the guidance Brian received from his parents, he also referenced the academic, social, and emotional support he received from his siblings:

I typically went to my sister [for support], because she was always, I don't know. I thought I could relate myself more to her than my brother. I mean I also did go to my brother for some support, but him was more about like just going out and having a good time. She was more about talking about real stuff.

Although Brian relied on numerous informal supports in high school, he also explained that he felt it was important to develop a strong sense of independency in high school in order to be successful in college:

In high school, I had a lot of help from parents ... I was just being constantly told, "You're not going to have someone to wake you up for class." ... I wanted to be more independent when I was in my senior year of high school.

Kyle shared detailed accounts of the impact of the support he received from his parents, siblings, friends, and teammates while in high school. Kyle explained that his mother played an influential role as a strong support while he was in high school,

according to Kyle, “my mom, actually, because she played a ... she was definitely involved in the whole special education process ... she would help me with my homework pretty much every single night.” Kyle shared that his mother’s support significantly influenced his ability to academically succeed in high school. While Kyle received additional guidance from his mother, he also recalled relying on his friends for emotional and academic support, Kyle stated, “Yeah, sometimes I would mostly use my friends for emotional support or if we're in the same class, for example, I would ask a question on a certain assignment or ask if they wanted to study for a test together.” Kyle shared that he also relied on his teammates for additional support in high school: “just the people [teammates] I met, even though some of them were more like acquaintances, we would still talk and hang out a lot, even outside the team. We just helped each other out through really hard times.” Kyle also revealed the impact of his siblings’ support on his ability to adapt to the high school environment:

So pretty much we did a layout of what paths I can take to get to my classes on time and stuff like that. Pretty much by the first day of high school my sister drove me, I felt really confident. I felt I knew what I was doing. I wasn't really nervous at all. Because I had the fortune of my sister there as a support guide, but my two sisters, they never had that. They never had that chance or support. What was really nice too was that even when I found my first class and I was getting ready, my sister, her class was just right across the hallway and she came in shortly before class and asked if I was okay and everything was going good and I said, "Yeah".

When discussing his reliance on informal support in high school, Jack shared, “My parents really helped me a lot. My dad helped me with math a lot. My mom helped me with reading and writing and going over some stuff.” Jack also shared that his parents influenced his decision to go to college:

They [parents] were really on me about getting into college. 'Cause I knew I wanted to, but I was just ... I just didn't like school at all in high school, so I just ... But they knew if they could get me here and see how great it was, being in the college life, and getting an education outside of high school, that I would want to be able to stay here and actually do well for myself here.

Chris recalled that he relied on minimal support systems in high school. He shared that he felt many of the burdens and challenging situations he experienced fell on his shoulders, which resulted in Chris navigating the demands of high school without additional informal support. Although Chris explained that he often engaged in a strong sense of independence and self-reliance when it came to difficult situations, he did share that he had access to supports, if necessary.

The present study also sought to explore the impact of informal support systems among students with disabilities in college. As revealed throughout the interviews, while in college, many students began relying on a wider variety of informal supports than in high school, such as student organizations, campus resources, and religious-based affiliations. A higher level of academic success was found among students that shared an increased level of engagement in informal support systems. For instance, Lynn shared that she continued to utilize the support systems she one relied on in high school while in

college. Once she entered college, Lynn began developing closer support relationships with her siblings and campus organizations. Lynn outlined the impact of her siblings' support by sharing, "I have two older brothers and they took me on college campuses ... 'This is where you can go and this is where you can ... get help.'" Lynn's siblings provided her with a variety of tools and strategies to effectively navigate the world of higher education. At the time, Lynn's siblings had recently graduated from higher education institutions, so they were able to recall their prior experiences to encourage Lynn to become more comfortable advocating for her needs in a college setting. Lynn shared that her older brother provided guidance and support by discussing "life strategies, in general, and how to survive college. How to start applying for jobs. How to start ahead of the game." Lynn also explained that she turned to her siblings for motivational guidance:

My oldest brother, [John], said, hey [Lynn], just reach out to your professor, and keep doing what you're doing, it's gonna work out in the end. In that spark of a moment, I was like, okay, let's do this ... I got this.

Lynn shared that when she hits roadblocks, she always remembers her brother's insightful words of encouragement to continue to persevere. Along with the positive impact of her siblings' support, Lynn explained the influential impact of her involvement in Greek Life on campus:

Another big support would actually be the whole Greek community, especially because last semester I was thinking, "Well, I can't do this anymore," and she [sorority member] said, "You're stressed. Quit your job. Just ... you've been

complaining about it and it's been a year, so just drop it ... you don't have time to relax." They noticed that I physically looked worn down.

Throughout her collegiate career, Lynn relied on support from her sorority to persevere throughout difficult situations. Lynn recalled, "They're big supporters, too, because we do have a sisterhood ... it's called sisterhood because we all just get together. It's just our group of sisters and they're really supportive." Lynn also outlined the supportive influence her sorority "big sister" had on her academic career:

I like to talk to her because ... she just graduated from here. I'm like, "Is this bad to drop it [course] if I have stress?" And she said no and she actually helped me decide which major I wanted to go into.

Along with the support received from campus organizations, Lynn also relied on social and emotional guidance from a close friend in college. Through their interactions, Lynn learned that her friend was also diagnosed with a similar disorder, which led to a strong, supportive friendship. Lynn recalled, "I didn't realize this about my friend, but she has borderline anxiety, too. And we just talk out loud on the phone. Basically, "How's your day? How can I help you manage your stress?" Lynn explained the significance of support systems on her academic success in college by explaining how she often relied on her mother for additional support when she experiences stress in college. Lynn shared that she often turns to her mother for guidance and support when she is faced with difficult decisions and is experiencing a heightened level of stress and anxiety regarding course outcomes: "[Lynn], you got to relax. You don't have to be perfect anymore." And that's how my mom supported me."

Although Rachel received a significant amount of support from her parents in high school, she explained that she greatly appreciated having a strong support system in college because she felt it would be difficult for her parents to support her in ways that would meet her academic needs at this level:

Because college is different than when my parents went through college, so my parents don't understand where if the teacher emails you, you have to email them within the hour. And they don't understand that, they're just like, "Why can't you just talk to them the next day?" I'm like, "Well, that's not how things work now".

While Rachel received a significant amount of support from her parents, she also recalled the influential support she received from her friends in high school. Rachel recalled, "I had great friends freshman year to middle of junior year and that helped a lot with my determination." Although Rachel received influential support from her friends in high school, she recalled the lack of support she received her senior year of high school, once her educational goals shifted from that of her friend group:

But senior year I didn't have that many friends because I was the only one, not really the only one but, I was really the only one that was focusing on the future. That kind of got me down. I was just like, "I'm kind of all alone, no one really understands that this isn't gonna last forever. Yeah, we're seniors. Yeah, we rule that school but yet we don't rule the school because next year we're gonna be floundering again."

When discussing the impact of informal support systems, Rachel also referenced the influence of the support she received from her friends in college. Similar to high school,

Rachel explained the importance of the support she received from her friend group and how this type of support impacted her determination to succeed:

Especially last semester, I had "friends" last semester but I didn't have friends, you know what I mean? Compared to last semester, this semester I knew so much better because I have that friend group that's outside of your family to push you up that knows exactly what you're going through exactly right now.

Rachel also outlined how the support from her friends allowed her to remain persistent and persevere through difficult and challenging situations:

I was trying to write a paper last night but I couldn't get the ball rolling. And I was like, "What is that one word?" And you describe it and they're [friends] like, "Boom, this is the word" or "I'm so frustrated with this" and you have a 5-minute rant, you both have 5-minute rants, and then you're done. It just gets off your chest. And all your friends are like, "Let it go, it's fine. You can't do anything about it now. Just focus on what you can." Someone actually saying it to you, not your brain just telling it to you. If you have no friends, you have nothing.

While in college, Brian revealed that he continued to utilize support from his parents and siblings, while receiving additional support from friends and campus resources:

[Relied on] Parents' support, a lot. I really rely on my siblings, just to vent to them. Or my mom, a lot. I go to the counseling center for more of emotional support. Friends here, definitely. Going out with my friends. It's always good to go out and forget, oh my gosh, I just screwed up on an exam, or I felt like I could

have done better on that paper. I'm going out with my friends, I don't have to think about that.

Although Brian's involvement in additional campus resources and organizations provided him with different avenues of informal support, he also recalled that his involvement in Greek Life added additional stress to his already demanding schedule, "I was in Greek Life for a time, so that was more social people. But I since left because it was just too stressful and I felt like it was taking my time away from class work." While Brian experienced difficult situations when involved in a Greek Life organization, he felt that he could turn to a staff member in the Achieve Success program for additional support and guidance. When working through difficult and challenging situations in college, Brian shared the influential impact a program staff member had on his ability to persevere:

I mean I have a really good relationship with [Jim]. Him and I always talk. He's such a positive person I would say. He always knows how to make my day better. Every time I see him he's such a joyful individual. I can definitely go to him. He's a great guy.

While discussing the impact of his support systems on his academic achievement in college, Kevin shared the importance of having proper outlets and people to turn to for guidance. He also shared that the development of his verbal communication skills has aided in his ability to advocate for his needs and seek assistance, when necessary. Brian shared, "I feel like I can go and talk to them more, and especially since I know how to express myself a lot more, better, I think that it's definitely a big improvement, yeah."

While Kyle explained that he relied on a variety of informal supports in high school, he also shared that his siblings played an influential role in his ability to transition and adapt to college:

the only time that my sister [Britney] played a huge role was college prep. It was actually a year ago at this time that I went to their college just to see what a college classroom looks like and the lecture.

Kyle's siblings also provided additional support to aid in his ability to adapt to the college environment and campus life:

I stayed with them for three days and my sister would challenge me to, like, okay this is kind of like you have to plan on your own when it comes to college, like, what food you might want to bring with you just in case, or chart out, like, have a schedule when you wanna do academic stuff, when to relax. And there was one point where, with my sister [Britney], we made a map and she told me what would be the fastest way to get to this building 'cause she was gonna hang up some of these posters and I was actually helping her prepare for a presentation she was gonna give the weekend after I was up there.

While Kyle's siblings played an influential role in his ability to successfully adapt to the college setting, he also shared that his involvement in a variety of campus organizations aided in his ability to adapt to the higher-level demands of college:

I really just feel that the organizations that I'm involved in on campus ... has helped me develop certain skills that I've taken advantage of, like studying skills. Again it's more of the time management, especially when it comes to getting

things done in a timely manner. Applying those skills that I learned in the organizations to, like, okay we have to get this done at a certain time, or brainstorming ideas, creating an agenda, which I am doing right now for the Achieve Success [student organization], or remembering assignments for classes, like, oh this is gonna be due I better write that down in my planner so I don't forget and ... utilizing my planner more too.

Although Jack shared that he relied on his parents for guidance and support in high school, he explained that he relies only minimally on his family, friends, and peers as support systems in college, by stating, "Not really. I'd probably try to use my family if they were closer and they could just help me with revising things quick, but they're so far away and they're all busy." Jack did, however, mention that he relied on support from Achieve Success staff when he encountered difficult situations, "plus I have Achieve Success [support] so I can do that." Jack also revealed the impact of receiving minimal support from friends while in college:

I think not having that many friends. I had all my friends in high school and I would do stuff with them all the time, like homework and stuff. Then I got here [college] and I was just doing it all by myself, so I wasn't that determined."

Although Jack's reliance on friends for support was minimal in college, he did recall the impact of the support he received from his parents when he is faced with challenging situations:

I text them, and I talk to them all the time. They talk me down sometimes, if I get really stressed out or something they tell me they know how hard it is and stuff,

'cause they weren't very good students in high school, but then they got to college and they figured it out. They know I can do it if I try, so that's what they're trying to do. Try to make me understand.

Jack also explained that he relies on his teammates for academic support, when needed. Jack would often seek support from his teammates when he was met with a challenging academic obstacle. Jack appreciated the support from his peers, even after he was removed from the team due to a decrease in his overall GPA:

Yeah, it's nice, 'cause I was having trouble with my grades at the beginning, so I couldn't play, but I had a lot of teammates that were like, sometimes in the same class as me or had taken them, so they would help me out a lot.

Although Jack recalled receiving academic support from friends, teammates, and family, he relies on minimal support services to meet his emotional needs. Similar to experiences shared by Jack, Chris shared that he relies on minimal informal support services in college: “Normally, I can just depend on myself, but there are people I can talk to, if I want to talk to someone.”

Impact of the development and utilization of self-determination

The fifth influential theme shed a light on the importance of a driven mindset by revealing that the development and utilization of self-determination skills positively impacted students' ability to persist, remain determined, and academically achieve in college. Findings reveal that students' level of determination and persistence was largely impacted by their perceived level of *grit* to succeed and remained motivated through challenging academic and personal hurdles. Many students revealed that their perceived

level of internal determination largely impacted their ability to persevere and persist through challenging academic and personal hurdles. Throughout the discussions, Lynn often referenced her strong sense of determination and how her positive mindset has impacted her academic success. Lynn explained, “I just knew, like right off the bat, that I am determined to do this, and more students [in high school] weren’t. I helped them [teachers] guide how I learned best.” Lynn shared that she attributes much of her success to her high level of determination and her strong sense of motivation to reach her established goals. Lynn also spoke about the importance of having a positive attitude:

If you don’t have determination, practically in every situation, you’re not going to achieve it. And it’s just with having disabilities in general, if you don’t have that, it’s so easy to say, “Oh, I have this and this and this is why I’m doing horrible.”

And so ... in classes, but nowadays, your attitude plays a big factor.

Lynn’s strong sense of determination has significantly impacted her ability to remain focused and driven while in college:

And most people don’t get it here because they want to go partying every night and all weekend. I’m like, no. You’re here for college. You’re here to graduate.

And that’s what I keep on telling myself to keep that determination going. It’s been working so far.

Lynn recalled always having a strong sense of determination, but in high school, she really began channeling her motivation towards academic achievement. In order to better prepare for college, Lynn took her high school academics very seriously. She explained that she saw high school as a form of preparation for college:

I always had that drive but in elementary school, it's fairly easy. As soon as you hit high school, it's just like ... this is going to help you get in [college]. It's a big reality check. This is going to be harder. This is an intro to college, basically.

Similar to experiences shared by Lynn, Rachel outlined the significant role her level of determination played on her academic success in college. She explained that, more recently, she has realized just how motivated she really is and how her strong sense of determination to succeed has impacted her academic succeed in college:

It really has took me a while to realize how determined I am. I didn't realize that until probably ... This semester has just opened my eyes from that. I really don't know why. It's only been what? The fourth week. I'm very determined compared to most people that I know.

When leaving high school and entering the world of higher education, Brian saw his parents as a significant motivational factor in his drive to do well in school. Brian referenced the impact of his parents' support on his motivation to achieve academic success by stating, "So it was just like I'm leaving my parents and now I can prove to them either that I don't have this and I'm not going to do well, or I can become an adult and, yeah, take everything seriously." Brian explained that determination means constant improvement and the ability to engage in positive self-reflection. Brian shared that he reflects on prior experiences in order to learn and grow as an individual:

And determination, for me, is when you fail in life, you learn from that mistake. I can say I've failed a lot. Even in stuff that can't be graded. It's just more personal failures and out of those, yeah, some still need improving on, but I always feel

like I'm constantly learning and I'm my best self as my most current self, and I can look on the past and say, "This is something I can improve." And that's always been the person who I ... Even as a little kid, that self-reflecting person. That's what determination means. This improvement, constant improvement and looking for strategies to make your life easier.

When discussing his decision to continue his educational path, Brian shared, "It was more just my own self-determination of wanting to be able to experience a different life."

Brian explained that his strong sense of determination, which was instilled at a young age, impacted his decision to attend college. When tasked with a difficult decision or a stressful semester, Brian often engages in positive self-talk to remain determined and focused in school:

I think what's keeping me pushing through is just to see how far I can go. It's not like, "Oh, someone's relying on me." It's more for my own self-reliance saying, "Hey, I made it this far. Why can't I make it another step. I should keep this momentum running, I shouldn't take a semester off, because I'm stressed out. I should keep on going with it."

Brian also shared that he is his own biggest motivator, and his main goal is to "just prove it to everybody that I can do it." Brian explained that seeing the academic demands of college as a full-time commitment also keeps him driven and motivated to succeed. Brian shared, "I'm determined ... I would say school's my job. I'm like, I'm doing my full-time job right now. Learning and experiencing my life right now." Kyle shared that his level of determination is impacted by his ability to help and learn from others, enrolling in

challenging courses, and gaining new skills. Kyle explained that these motivational factors encourage him to explore and grow as a learner in a college setting:

I think my level of determination increases just because I wanna be that one person that people can turn to for assistance and that I can learn a few things from them that would just help me push to become more successful. Challenge myself with harder classes, especially when I get to the upper level classes in my major and minor. Gaining new skills like trying new things and just not failing one single class.

Kyle described the importance of sticking to a schedule and how his time management and organizational skills have impacted his ability to persist through his academically demanding course schedule. Kyle outlined the importance of utilizing his developed skills by stating, “organizational skills, and it's made me determined to always have a set schedule. And being aware of some of the consequences that could potentially happen if you don't have a set system, or if you don't prioritize your things.” Similar to experiences shared by Kyle, Brian explained that his motivation to succeed is also often impacted by course content, observing the experiences of his peers, and his relationships with his professors:

Sometimes it's the topics in the class that I find fascinating. Sometimes it's more just the people. Sometimes it's watching other people just not be too successful, knowing that you can probably be more successful. I know that sounds kind of mean, but it's just another good motivator. Sometimes it's just the student/teacher

relationship, and if I'm interested in the discussion I want to contribute my opinion or just kind of answer the question.

When discussing his sense of determination in college, Jack shared that he is, at times, his own biggest roadblock. However, Jack explained that he is working toward channeling his determination into appropriate outlets that support academic success. Jack shared that although he has access to available resources to support him academically, he struggles with taking the initiative to utilize those available services:

I can be pretty determined when I want to be, so if I want to get something done I usually can. I'll go on the Internet and I'll figure out how to do it if I can't. Or, I'll go and I'll read the book and stuff, and I'll figure it out. But I never really used to do that, which was bad. I'd always be like, "Yeah, I'll figure it out another day" or something, and I'll put it off and then I'll never come back to it, which was always bad.

Jack shared that during his first semester in college, he struggled with adjusting to the academic and social demands of college, and his experiences weighed heavily on his overall academic success. When referencing previous semesters, Jack recalled, "I think it's the same as most semesters. I start off really strong, and I just ... I get as far as I can and then I try to make it through the full semester without every slacking off, but I usually start." Jack shared that once the fall semester started, he felt underprepared and experienced a lack of confidence in his academic abilities. Jack shared that, "Seeing how hard and different things were, and how unready I really was. And how much it was

gonna take for me to get at the level I need to be at” negatively impacted his determination level.

While discussing his previous experiences in college, Chris shared the different motivators in his life that drive him to achieve. In high school, witnessing the success of his peers impacted Chris’ determination; Chris shared that, “People I saw there [high school], on the right track” impacted his motivation to succeed. He shared that his end goal is to earn a job after college; however, he realizes that he will need to change many of the academic habits in order to succeed. Chris explained, “I want to get a good job after school. I didn't do good those other semesters, but I really think I can move on from that and do a lot better.” Chris also shared that he wants to show others that he can persist through academic challenges and obtain a college degree. Chris confirmed, “I feel like now I really wanna prove people wrong, that I can do it.” Lynn also shared that she is motivated by her previous successes. Lynn sees graduation from college for students with disabilities as no easy feat, and she wants to prove to those around her that she is capable of achieving success:

I’m determined to graduate in four years, and that’s really unheard of, even for most students without disabilities. It just gives me motivation because not a lot of people with disabilities finish college. A lot of people outside my family don’t think I can do it, and that gives me more motivation to prove them wrong.

In order to stay motivated, Rachel explained that she keeps her end goal at the forefront of all that she does:

End goal. That end goal. Not getting accepted into a nursing program is very haunting but that end goal, looking at the big picture like, "I am in this stupid anthropology class because I wanna become a nurse. We're doing this. Everyone has to go through it. We all have to do it." ... But, that end goal.

When faced with a challenging situation, Rachel explained that she will often “visualize” her future success as a strategy to remain motivated:

Sometimes just visualizing yourself walking across that stage, getting that diploma in your hand and being like, "Whoop, tassel - I don't know which way it goes but - tassel over. I did it. I'm actually gonna become a nurse, this is going to happen". It's gonna take me, I don't know, 5-and-a-half years. I don't care, it's going to happen.”

Lynn also revealed that her family plays a significant role in her ability to remain determined and persist through challenges. When looking for a moral boost, Lynn often refers to a personal message she received from her brother. While beginning to tear up, Lynn shared, “I keep looking at this note that he [brother] wrote for my birthday, he said, ‘you’re the most determined person that I know, and just keep on being you.’”

Summary

To gain a better understanding of the impact of support services on the academic success of students with disabilities in college, the researcher focused on the influence of a variety of formal and informal support services at the secondary and postsecondary education level. In order to further explore the influence of such supports on academic success, the researcher explored the impact of secondary education instructional support,

informal support systems, and comprehensive support services at the postsecondary education level. The exploration of secondary education experiences aimed to reveal the perceived impact of received instructional support on the academic success of students in college. The researcher also explored the impact of informal support systems by examining the level of support received from parents, siblings, friends, peers, and organizations at both the secondary and postsecondary education level. By exploring the impact of informal supports, the researcher was able to better understand the influence of support systems outside of the institution. In order to create a triangulation of explored topics, the researcher also focused on the level of comprehensive, wrap-around support services at the postsecondary education level and how this type of support impacts students' academic achievement in college. The researcher sought to determine the influence of this type of support on a students' ability to become academically successful. While exploring the varying formal and informal supports, the researcher also explored the impact of self-determination and motivational factors and how these factors influenced the success of students with disabilities in college.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived impact of informal support, secondary transition instruction, and postsecondary education support programs on the achievement of academic success among students with learning disabilities (LD). The researcher further explored the impact of support services on academic achievement and the development of self-determination and self-advocacy skills, and how these developed skills impact students' success in college. In the present study, the researcher utilized a series of semi-structured individual interviews in order to gain a better understanding of the impact of support services. The researcher sought to answer the following research questions:

Do college students with LDs perceive the secondary transition curriculum and support services they engaged in as supportive to their college success?

Do college students with disabilities perceive informal supports as supportive and crucial to their academic, social, emotional, and environmental adjustment to postsecondary education?

Do college students with LDs perceive postsecondary support programs that focus on the development of self-advocacy, determination, and academic independence as supportive to their college success?

Transitional Supports

When exploring the impact of transitional supports on student success in college, the results reported in this survey were consistent with those of a number of other studies, including findings shared by McDonald and Farrell (2012) that indicated the importance of providing students with a strong secondary education curriculum that outlines the importance of college readiness factors, including academic, social, and personal preparedness. The *voices* of many student participants included in the present study shared their experiences by outlining the significant impact that college preparation support had on their overall success in college. Lynn shared that her secondary education curriculum positively influenced her transition to college by providing her with instruction that focused on strategies to meet the higher-level academic demands of college:

I would actually say my high school courses [really prepared me for college], starting from freshman year because it was this high school ... most highly ... I would say highly competitive for academics. But high school is like, “Here’s a reality check. You’re going to go through harder classes than this in college, but we’re going to prepare you.”

Rachel also explained the significant impact her high school teachers had on her ability to transition from a high school setting, that focused on college readiness, to a college setting routed in self-advocacy and higher-level thinking:

I mean I had one teacher in high school that really ... especially right away in sophomore year, she’d be like, “This is not how its gonna be in college. You have

to go to your professor. Your professor's not gonna come to you. They don't care. They don't really care at all. So you have to." All that kind of stuff. That was really good.

Similar to experiences shared by Lynn and Rachel, Brian provided insight into the impact his English teacher had on becoming academically prepared from college-level demands:

My English teacher junior year ... would treat it [high school] like it was college ... he was really adamant on just being ... hard, but he was doing that for a reason. I didn't think he was out to get us, personally. I respected him for that. I thought it was really excellent with kind of learning about how to apply this in college.

Kyle also revealed that his previous coursework in high school positively influenced his ability to acclimate to the college-level demands:

My employability skills class that I took my junior year of high school, that was a huge help to me, because it's actually what helped me decide what I wanted to major in. When I was doing college research, it actually helped me narrow down to three of my top college choices ... and it's been so beneficial.

The findings revealed in the present study were consistent with results indicated by Joshi and Bouck (2017) in which study participants revealed the significant impact of receiving core content instruction in a general education setting on their ability to attend college and succeed at that level. The impact of receiving advocacy-based instruction in high school is significant and becomes an important issue when students are expected to engage in effective self-advocacy skills from the moment they set foot on a college campus. In order for students with disabilities to be successful in higher education, they

must be provided with instruction that focuses on the development of self-advocacy, self-determination, disability identity, reasonable accommodations, and independence (Brinckerhoff, 1994). Similar to findings evident by the present study, McDonald and Farrell (2012) outlined that students involved in a pre-college experience that focused on the development of college readiness instruction experienced a more effective acclimation to college-level work. Lynn, Rachel, Brian, and Kyle shared the positive impact their high school curriculums and additional support from teachers had on their ability to acclimate to college.

While Lynn, Rachel, Brian, and Kyle provided insight into the positive impact of their previous instruction and support, Jack revealed that he received minimal college preparation support in high school, which negatively impacted his acclimation to and academic success in college:

They never really taught us how to advocate for ourselves, they just told us we had to do it. They're like, "Your gonna have to advocate for yourselves in college." But then we're in high school and they didn't tell us how to do it or anything. I mean, I understood that it meant to advocate for yourself and talk to professors ... but I didn't know how to do it or what it meant to do, or what I was supposed to say, or what they were gonna say back to me or what I was supposed to expect.

Similar to experiences shared by Jack, Chris felt underprepared when he entered college, due to the lack of prior college readiness instruction:

I wish I would have taken a harder class. To get me more prepared. Because what I kind of saw in college, it was harder. Maybe like just taking an honors class or something, just to see, how hard. And that's something that I've never taken. So once I got to college, I saw that the classes were tough. It was kind of new.

As revealed throughout the provided excerpts, Lynn, Rachel, Brian, and Kyle shared that their prior instruction in the area of college readiness positively impacted their ability to acclimate to the college environment. Student participants also shared that the college preparation instruction they received significantly impacted their ability to become academically successful in college. Refer to figures 2, 3, 4, and 7 for student GPAs indicating academic achievement in college. While Lynn, Rachel, Brian, and Kyle shared the positive impact of college readiness instruction, Jack and Chris shared that their lack of college preparation instruction negatively impacted their success in college. Refer to figures 5 and 6 for student GPAs indication academic achievement in college. As found by Troiano, et al. (2010), students without prior college preparation instruction are often not prepared for the level of self-advocacy, diligence, decision-making, self-reflection, and goal setting that is required for success in college. Jack and Chris shared that their lack of instruction in the areas of self-advocacy development, determination, and overall college preparation negatively impacted their ability to academically achieve at the college level.

Similar to findings outlined by Solberg, et al. (2012), student voices revealed the significant impact of high school curriculum and transition support on students' ability to successfully acclimate to the heightened level of academic, social, and emotional demands

of college. Research conducted by Solberg et al. (2012) aligns with findings evident in the present research in that both studies outlined findings that emphasized the value and importance of providing a meaningful, engaging high school curriculum that explores college readiness and preparation strategies with students with disabilities. Along with providing instruction routed in college readiness, Solberg et al. (2012) revealed the importance of providing high school instruction that focuses on self-determination development. Many of the student voices in the present study revealed the importance of self-determination development on their ability to successfully navigate the demands of higher education. Lynn outlined the influential significance of having a determined and positive mindset and how this outlook on life had a positive impact on her ability to succeed in college:

if you don't have determination, practically in every situation, you're not going to achieve it. And it's just with having disabilities in general, if you don't have that, it's so easy to say, "Oh, I have this and this and this is why I'm doing horrible."

And so ... in classes, but nowadays, your attitude plays a big factor.

Comparable to experiences shared by Lynn, Rachel shared that she has always seen herself as determined, but her support systems and prior educational experiences have also influenced her level of motivation to succeed:

It really has took me a while to realize how determined I am. I didn't realize that until probably ... This semester has just opened my eyes from that. I really don't know why. It's only been what? The fourth week. I'm very determined compared to most people that I know.

Aligned closely to findings revealed by Solberg et al. (2012), these student voices outlined the direct impact that their prior educational experiences had on the ability to become determined learners. Kyle also outlined self-determination development in high school by explaining that he would “Challenge myself with harder classes and gaining new skills like trying new things.” Kyle’s willingness to enroll in challenging courses and motivation to develop crucial skills in high school impacted his ability to engage in self-determination and a higher level of academic achievement in college. These students also shared the importance of self-determination on their ability to academically succeed in college. Refer to figures 2, 3, and 7 for student GPAs indicating academic achievement in college.

Similar to findings surrounding the importance of self-determination instruction, previous research has outlined the impact of self-advocacy development and inclusion in challenging higher-level courses in high school on students’ ability to academically adapt to college (McCall, 2015). Study participants revealed the positive impact of high school instruction geared toward self-advocacy development and inclusion in higher-level courses as crucial to their academic success in college (McCall, 2015). Similar to findings revealed by McCall (2015), student participants included in the present study revealed the importance of advocacy development in high school. Rachel provided a detailed description of how self-advocacy development was integrated into her high school curriculum:

My high school really pushed it [advocacy]. Especially one teacher that was like, “Your professor is not gonna come and sit next to you during class and be like,

‘Are you understanding this?’ They’re gonna be every man for themselves. You gotta tell your professors what your problems are. What you need help with, where you’re lost. Go to his office hours. Email him. Email him, email him, email him”. She drilled that into our heads.

Rachel shared that the requirement to advocate for her needs in high school largely impacted her ability to advocate for her needs in college. Rachel’s shared experiences aligned closely with findings shared by Connor (2012) where it was revealed that appropriate college preparation instruction in high school that includes increased academic demands is essential to future success in a higher education setting. Rachel shared that the prior instruction she received in high school, positively influenced her ability to acclimate to college level demands. Similar to experiences shared by Rachel, Kyle felt that his high school courses significantly impacted his development of self-advocacy skills and his ability to utilize these developed skills in college courses:

we talked about advocacy and what we thought it meant and then some examples and what you actually should do and they gave us some strategies of how we can advocate for ourselves. And some of those ideas stuck to me and I actually applied it, I mean, one of the advocacy skills that I have right away was I wasn't afraid to ask questions in front of the class or staying after a little bit to get help, especially with German or Physics 2. I wasn't afraid to ask a question or even on a test like if I needed a question to be, like, what is it trying to ask, have it reread differently.

Both Rachel and Kyle shared that the development of self-advocacy skills, prior to college, played an influential role in their ability to adapt to college level demands. Figure 3 and 7 outline Rachel and Kyle's academic achievement in college (GPA). The development of strong self-advocacy skills, prior to enrollment in a higher education institution, is crucial for success at this level (Connor, 2012). A finding reported by Lombardi, et al. (2011) that was consistent with the present research revealed that self-advocacy was the most important skill for college students with disabilities. In accordance with findings revealed by Connor (2012), Jack shared that his lack of self-advocacy instruction and development in high school negatively impacted his ability to adapt to college-level demands:

They never really taught us how to advocate for ourselves, they just told us we had to do it. They're like, "Your gonna have to advocate for yourselves in college." But then we're in high school and they didn't tell us how to do it or anything.

Figure 5 outlines Jack's academic achievement in college (GPA).

Study participants also revealed the importance of receiving a meaningful and challenging high school curriculum that focused on the development of skills essential for success in college. Lynn's experience with a high school curriculum that supported the high-level demands of college provided her with the necessary tools and strategies to become a successful learner in a college-based setting:

It was really geared towards setting you up for the right way in college, because their academic curriculum for high school, like, [my] high school's probably a

little bit above average, I would say. Because they [teachers] gave you a lot of tests back to back to back, because in college you can't choose what time you want to go to the classes, and stuff like that, but in high school, it was like, here, you have six tests for one class, you gotta do more than others.

Rachel's experience taking college-based instructional courses at a local college provided her with the opportunity to develop higher-level academic skills while also continuing to receive support and guidance from her teachers throughout the process.

And that was how I transitioned. I had the support of my high school, but being able to come back and be like, "Okay. So this happened." And I had a one-on-one kind of thing with one of my teachers and she helped me navigate how to study.

Yeah. She helped me out with learning how to talk to my professor.

Brian also shared similar experiences regarding his involvement with college preparation instruction in high school. Brian shared that his teachers held higher standards that closely align with the demands of college, which positively supported his acclimation to college:

My English teacher junior year ... would treat it [high school] like it was college ... he was really adamant on just being ... hard, but he was doing that for a reason.

I didn't think he was out to get us, personally. I respected him for that. I thought it was really excellent with kind of learning about how to apply this in college.

Personally, it's just yeah, you got to understand why they're doing it.

Kyle also shared the impact of his college-based writing course by stating, "I have to say the number one class [that better prepared me] is college writing ... in college

writing the techniques that my teacher taught really helped me improve my writing significantly to the point of, again, gaining independence.” Experiences shared by Lynn, Rachel, Brian, and Kyle closely align with findings reported by Connor (2012). These four student participants provided an insight into the everlasting impact of secondary education curriculum on a student’s ability to achieve success in college. Experiences outlined by both Jack and Chris also revealed the importance of receiving meaningful and challenging instruction in high school by outlining the negative impact of a curriculum lacking in college readiness and preparation instruction (Connor, 2012). Jack outlined that the lack of college preparation instruction in high school negatively impacted his ability to acclimate to the University:

I had to change everything when I came here [college] because in high school ... I was so unorganized ... I didn’t do any of my stuff like I should have been. I had to completely change that all when I got here to be successful.

Chris shared that he felt taking higher-level courses with increased academic demands would have had a positive influence on his ability to adapt to and succeed in college.

I wish I would have taken a harder class. To get me more prepared. Because what I kind of saw in college, it was harder. Maybe like just taking an honors class or something, just to see, how hard. And that’s something that I’ve never taken. So once I got to college, I saw that the classes were tough. It was kind of new.

While student participants in the present study revealed the importance of a meaningful, challenging, and engaging high school experience that focuses on the development of self-advocacy, determination, and college-level academic skills, they also outlined the

importance of the support they received from the Achieve Success summer transition program and how this type of transition instruction impacted their acclimation to college.

Postsecondary education transition support. When exploring the findings related to postsecondary transition support on students' success in college, the results reported in this survey were consistent with the findings revealed by McDonald and Farrell (2012). McDonald and Farrell (2012) shared that student voices gathered from study interviews outlined the importance of completing a college readiness program prior to enrollment in college by outlining the impact of this type of instruction on student success in college (McDonald & Farrell, 2012). Study participants shared that being immersed within a college environment, including the enrollment in college courses and interacting with college students and faculty, significantly influenced their readiness for college. Participants of the present study shared the positive impact the Achieve Success summer transition program had on their ability to adapt to increased demand for self-advocacy utilization when requesting academic support. Lynn shared that her enrollment in the summer program provided her with the proper knowledge and skills to appropriately access accommodations during her first semester of college by stating, "I probably wouldn't have figured out that, 'Oh, I have all these accommodations that I can use.'"

Similar to experiences shared by Lynn, Rachel felt that attending the Achieve Success summer program provided her with the necessary skills to adapt to the college environment: "If I didn't go to that summer program, I wouldn't have known anything." Rachel outlined the full extent in which the summer program aided in her college success

by sharing, “But definitely, the Achieve Success summer program really helped me a lot because being able to get that help. Like understanding what Achieve Success can do with it. Especially if we take it seriously. I don't know, some kids didn't take it seriously, but I took it seriously. And being able to get help.” Rachel felt that having the ability to ask for help, while being immersed in the campus environment, taking college courses, and learning to advocate her needs to faculty, contributed significantly to her academic success in college. Brian shared experiences that further supported the impact of transition-based instruction by indicating that enrolling in the Achieve Success summer program taught him to “initiate.” Brian also explained that the summer program allowed him to get in the “swing of things” before the start of his first semester in college. Brian shared that his experiences in the summer program and access to a curriculum that was structured around college readiness and preparation provided him with an opportunity to further explore the campus and gain a better understanding of the academic, social, emotional, and environmental demands of college.

Study participants shared a variety of experiences that highlighted the significant impact the summer transition program had on enhancing their self-advocacy skills and academic achievement in college; these findings closely aligned with results reported by Harrison, et al. (2012). Harrison et al. (2012) revealed that study participants felt their enrollment in the Learning Opportunities Task Force (LOTF) program significantly impacted their academic success in college. Harrison et al. (2012) revealed that participation in LOFT program contributed significantly to students’ academic success, and many students experienced a strong sense of satisfaction from their involvement in

the program. Participation in LOFT was also found to improve key functioning skills among students with disabilities. Similar to the LOFT program, the Achieve Success program was found to have an impact on students' acclimation to college, development and utilization of key skills, and students' ability to remain determined and persevere through challenging encounters.

Comprehensive support in postsecondary education. Similar to findings outlined by Harrison et al. (2012), a majority of participants in the present study revealed that they felt their enrollment in the Achieve Success program contributed significantly to their overall academic success. Along with participation in a college-level support program, Troiano et al. (2010) found that students who had reportedly higher levels of participation in the Learning Resources Center (LRC) had reportedly higher overall GPAs. Similar to Achieve Success, LRC is a comprehensive support program for students with LDs that fosters the development of independence through self-advocacy, self-determination, and self-esteem exploration (Troiano et al., 2010). Findings revealed that students who consistently attended academic support appointment and engaged in additional support services through LRC had reportedly higher GPAs overall (Troiano et al., 2010). Similar to findings provided by Troiano et al. (2010), the present study found that students that reported a higher level of engagement in support services offered through Achieve Success had reportedly higher GPAs overall.

Table 4. *Engagement in Support Services through Achieve Success*

Achieve Success Involvement	
Lynn	High rate of OT attendance, relies on support for academic, social, and emotional needs, enrollment in additional program courses to support academic success, full use of academic accommodations
Rachel	High rate of OT attendance, relies on support for academic, social, and emotional needs, enrollment in additional program courses to support academic success, full use of academic accommodations, utilizes program office to study and meet with tutors
Brian	High rate of OT attendance, full use of academic accommodations, student employee in Achieve Success program office
Jack	Low rate of OT attendance, minimal use of academic accommodations
Chris	High rate of OT attendance [lacked self-initiation and motivation to complete established goals], minimal use of academic accommodations
Kyle	High rate of OT attendance, relies on support for academic, social, and emotional needs, full use of academic accommodations, involvement in Achieve Success student organization

Although similarities were found between the present research and the findings outlined by Troiano et al. (2010), one participant (Chris) in the present study had a reportedly high rate of attendance but a reportedly lower GPA overall. Chris' lower overall GPA in comparison to his high rate of attendance can be attributed to his lack of self-initiation to follow through with the "plan for success" that was established during his weekly OT meetings. Although Chris had a reportedly high rate of attendance, Chris explained the negative impact that his lack of self-initiation and drive had on his overall success in college: "We went over good stuff, but I felt like once I left the meeting, I kind of didn't follow up on things that we talked about. That kind of hurt me a little bit. I think

maybe I lost focus.” Chris’ lack of focus and determination to complete the tasks that were discussed during his weekly OT meetings negatively impacted his academic success in college.

In order to gain the necessary skills and strategies to effectively navigate the world of higher education, students with disabilities benefit from the use of support services that further develop these crucial skills. The results included in the present study closely aligned with findings revealed from a study conducted by Parker and Boutelle (2009), which outlined the beneficial impact of executive function coaching to enhance overall academic success in college. The present study revealed that students shared a variety of experiences related to the impact of Achieve Success program support on their ability to adapt to higher-level demands while continuing to further develop the skills necessary for success. Similar to executive function coaching, as outlined by Parker and Boutelle (2009), the role of an OT is to provide students with guided support that fosters the development of self-advocacy, self-efficacy, self-determination, problem-solving skills, decision-making skills, goal setting, and academic independence. Similar to experiences shared by Lynn, Rachel, Jack, Chris, and Kyle, student interviews revealed that they decided to continue using executive function coaching throughout their academic semester because the support they received helped them achieve meaningful goals and strive for academic success (Parker & Boutelle, 2009). A majority of students from the present study also outlined the impact of OT support on their ability to succeed in college, and thus decided to continue receiving additional OT support throughout their academic semesters.

Findings revealed by Parker and Boutelle (2009) also included the beneficial impact that coaching had on students' ability to create positive emotional experiences. Student participants revealed that the coaching support they received provided them with additional social and emotional assistance that impacted their ability to persevere through challenging situations (Parker & Boutelle, 2009). Lynn shared that having the ability to reach out to her OT during stressful situations positively impacted her ability to work through challenging experiences: "And even with everybody [Achieve Success staff] else, they're really supportive there. They help ... they try to help whenever." Lynn felt that having the additional support from Achieve Success impacted her ability to remain focused and determined while in college. Similar to experiences shared by Lynn, findings revealed by Parker and Boutelle (2009) outlined that students felt the coaching support they received promoted the development and utilization of self-determination. Rachel also explained the significance of receiving OT support through Achieve Success by sharing, "Last semester, it was amazing. You know how much I went to Josie [Achieve Success staff member] last semester. I don't think I would have ... Who knows what could have happened, if I didn't have Achieve Success." While Rachel felt that she could go to her OT for additional emotional and social support, she also felt that she could turn to her OT for guidance when faced with a challenge: "I've actually just popped in at [Mara's] office so many times. And I'm like, "Gosh. Help me!" And if they don't know they can like lead you ... to someone else that knows." Rachel shared that the support she received significantly impacted her ability to remain determined and persevere throughout her first semester of college. Brian shared the impact of the support he received from his OT by

stating, “But [Nikki] was my go-to person ... I can always ask for help.” Brian explained that having someone right on campus as a strong support system was helpful when he needed additional guidance. In accordance with findings from the present study, Parker and Boutelle (2009) found that involvement in executive function coaching positively impacted students’ overall well-being and provided them with the opportunity to develop positive expectations regarding future goals.

Research revealed by both Field et al. (2003) and Parker and Boutelle (2009) reported the positive impact of fundamental skill development among students enrolled in the program. Similar to the findings outlined in the present study, Field et al. (2003) revealed that students felt their enrollment in a postsecondary education support program that focused on personal attributes and environmental factors positively impacted their success in college. Study results indicated that college-level skill development among student participants was crucial to their success in college. All student participants included in the present study shared the beneficial impact working with an OT had on the development of skills crucial to their success in college. It was noted, however, that the impact of Achieve Success support was dependent on a student’s willingness to self-advocate and self-initiate while remaining academically focused and driven. The study results revealed that students lacking the ability to self-advocate, self-initiate, and remain determined negatively impacted their ability to academically achieve. The lack of crucial skill development also played a negative role on students’ ability to further develop the necessary skills to succeed in college. Table 5 outlines the indicated skill development among student participants included in the present study.

Table 5. *Indicated Skill Development through Achieve Success Support*

Indicated Skill Development					
Lynn	Rachel	Brian	Jack	Chris	Kyle
Self-Advocacy	Self-Advocacy	Self-Advocacy	Organization skills	Organization skills	Self-Advocacy
Organizational skills	Organizational skills	Independency	Time management	Time management	Time management
Time management	Time Management	Study strategies	Academic support	Academic support	Stress management techniques
Independency	Goal Setting	Accommodation use	Emotional and social support	Factors impacting skill development:	Prioritizing techniques
Accommodation use	Decision-making	Guidance/advice	Mentor relationship	Factors impacting skill development:	Accommodation use
Emotional and social support	Study strategies	Engaged in additional program support services	*Lack of accommodation use	*Lack of accommodation use	Emotional and social support
Guidance/advice	Note-taking Strategies		*Lack of support resources use	*Lack of support resources use	Guidance/advice
Engaged in additional program support services	Reading comprehension		*Struggled with decision-making	*Loss of focus	
	Accommodation use		*Struggled with priorities	*Struggled with priorities	
	Emotional and social support		*Lack of self-initiation	*Lack of self-initiation	
	Engaged in additional program support services				

Informal Support

Although the present study found a significant impact between comprehensive postsecondary support services for students with disabilities and academic success, the research also reported a significant link between informal support systems, such as parents, siblings, friends, peers, and organizations, and students' ability to remain

determined and driven in college. It was found that informal support systems also had a positive impact on students' academic achievement in college. A study conducted by Couzens, et al. (2015) discovered that students found informal support systems to be the most effective and impactful sources of support on their academic success in college. Lombardi et al. (2011) also outlined that positive interactions with family have an influence on students' overall college experience. Lombardi et al. (2011) also found that social supports, such as family, friends, and peers, for students with disabilities may be just as influential as institutional supports, such as comprehensive support programs. Similar to the previously outlined research, the present study found that students who reported a higher level of engagement with informal supports were more likely to successfully acclimate to a higher education setting. Findings also revealed that the use of informal supports positively impacted students' academic achievement levels.

Lynn revealed that she often turned to her siblings for support and guidance. Lynn shared that her siblings would often provide her with words of encouragement and advice regarding the demands of higher education. Lynn recalled that her siblings provided her with guidance and advice regarding, "life strategies, in general, and how to survive college. How to start applying for jobs. How to start ahead of the game." Lynn also explained the impact of the support she received from her campus sorority: "They're big supporters, too, because we do have a sisterhood ... it's called sisterhood because we all just get together. It's just our group of sisters and they're really supportive." Lynn shared that the support she received from her family, as well as from her involvement in Greek Life, positively impacted her college experience. Rachel also recalled the impact

her parents' support had on her academic success: "My parents really pushed me a lot, but I can see some of the kids didn't have those kind of parents that I had." Alongside the support she received from her parents, Rachel also explained that the friends she met on campus have significantly impacted her college experience: "this semester I knew so much better because I have that friend group that's outside of your family to push you up that knows exactly what you're going through exactly right now. If you have no friends, you have nothing."

Similar to experiences shared by Lynn and Rachel, Brian shared that the support he received from his parents and tutors positively impacted his academic achievement. Brian also explained that he went to his sister for additional social and emotional support. While Brian explained that he still relied on his family for support in college, he also turns to campus resources, such as the counseling center, and his friends for additional support. Kyle also shared the significant impact of receiving additional support from his parents, siblings, and friends while in high school and college. When referencing high school, Kyle shared, "my mom, actually, because she played a ... she was definitely involved in the whole special education process ... she would help me with my homework pretty much every single night." Kyle also shared that his siblings played a significant role in his preparation for college by providing him with access to explore the college environment while they were in school. Similar to the positive impact of the support he received from his siblings, Kyle shared the impact his teammates had on his ability to work through challenging situations: "we would still talk and hang out a lot, even outside the team. We just helped each other out through really hard times." During his freshman

year in college, Kyle also became involvement in several student organizations. Kyle shared that while his involvement in various student organization has provided him with another strong support system, the clubs have also impacted his ability to further developed necessary skills for academic achievement: “I really just feel that the organizations that I'm involved in on campus ... has helped me develop certain skills that I've taken advantage of, like studying skills.” Kyle explained that the support he received from various organizations in both high school and college significantly impacted his ability to adapt to college life.

Jack recalled relying on his parents for support, however, once he enrolled in college and was a further distance away from home, relying on his parents for support was much more difficult. Jack also explained that he had a strong friend group in high school that provided him with social and emotional support, but experienced difficulty getting involvement and meeting new friends on campus. Jack shared that the lack of support from his friends negatively impacted his ability to remain determined:

I think not having that many friends. I had all my friends in high school and I would do stuff with them all the time, like homework and stuff. Then I got here [college] and I was just doing it all by myself, so I wasn't that determined.

Similar to experiences shared by Jack, Chris relied on minimal informal support systems while in high school and college. He shared that he felt many of the burdens and difficult situations he experienced fell on his shoulders and he was required to navigate the demands of college without additional informal support. Although he felt the need to work through difficult situations individually, he did share that he does have support

systems available to him, if necessary: “Normally, I can just depend on myself, but there are people I can talk to, if I want to talk to someone.”

Findings from the present study closely align with results shared by Lombardi et al. (2011). Both studies revealed the significant impact informal support systems had on students’ ability to become successful learners in college. Lombardi et al. (2011) also revealed that students who reported a higher level of family support experienced a greater level of self-advocacy, self-determination, and postsecondary skill development. Similar to these findings, the present study revealed that students who reported a higher level of parent involvement also had higher overall academic achievement, as reported by their GPAs. Also in correspondence with findings revealed by Lombardi et al. (2011), the present study found that students who reported strong levels of peer support, including social relationships outside of academics, peer mentoring, study groups, and tutoring, were more likely to have positive postsecondary experiences. Refer to table 6 for reported findings related to the use of informal support systems among student participants in High School verses College.

Table 6. *Informal Support*

Informal Support in High School					
Lynn	Rachel	Brian	Jack	Chris	Kyle
Parents	Parents	Parents	Parents		Parents
Siblings	Siblings	Siblings			Siblings
Friends	Friends				Friends
Peers	Peers				Peers
Organization	Organization				Athletic organization
Informal Support in College					
Lynn	Rachel	Brian	Jack	Chris	Kyle
Parents	Parents	Parents	Parents	Friends	Parents
Siblings	Siblings	Siblings	Friends	Athletic organization	Siblings
Friends	Friends	Friends	Athletic organization		Friends
Peers	Peers	Peers			Peers
Coworkers	Coworkers	Coworkers			Mentor
Greek Life	Student organization	Student organization			Greek Life
Student organization	Religious-based organization				Student organization

Self-Determination

Findings reported by Field et al. (2003) reported that self-determination instruction, including self-advocacy, goal setting, decision-making skills, and

communication skills, must be implemented into the secondary education curriculum in order for students to successfully transition to college and academically succeed in that type of environment. As revealed by study participants, the instruction received in high school largely impacted their ability to acclimate to the higher-level demands of college. Lynn, Rachel, Brian, and Kyle shared that the high school curriculum instruction they received focused on the development of skills necessary to succeed in college, such as: self-advocacy, goal setting, and decision-making. Student participants also shared that their involvement in the Achieve Success summer program and support services during the semester positively impacted their ability to further develop these fundamental skills.

Findings provided by the present study are consistent with a number of other studies focused on self-determination development among students with disabilities. Zheng et al. (2014) found that students with disabilities who reported higher levels of self-determination were more likely to experience social integration and academic achievement. As shown in the present study, students who perceived themselves as determined were more likely to effectively engage in social commitments and experience a high level of academic achievement (as indicated by their reported GPAs). For instance, Lynn, Rachel, Brian, and Kyle perceived themselves as highly determined and motivated to succeed. All three participants are socially integrated within campus organizations and receive support from a variety of informal resources, including: peers, friends, and tutors. Similar to findings presented by Zheng et al. (2014), the present study revealed that self-determination positively impacted factors associated with academic achievement for students with LDs. In relation to self-determination, DaDeppo (2009) revealed that a

student's level of social integration within the institution had a direct impact on their ability to persist in college.

As outlined by DaDeppo (2009), the extent to which a student becomes involved within an institution has an influential impact on their ability to remain persistent and academically successful in college. Similar to results shared by DaDeppo (2009), results from the present study revealed that students who experienced a higher level of integration within the campus community also shared a stronger sense of social and emotional satisfaction. The present study revealed that students who felt a stronger sense of social and emotional satisfaction were also more likely to experience a higher level of academic achievement. For instance, Lynn shared that she was involved in the Greek Life community, received tutoring support on campus, and also worked on campus. Although Lynn ultimately decided to end her campus job due to the academic demands, her level of involvement provided her with an array of social and emotional support that significantly impacted her ability to persist in college. When discussing her involvement on campus, Lynn shared, "Another big support would actually be the whole Greek community." Rachel was also involved in multiple campus organizations, an on campus religion-based center, and received additional on-campus tutoring support. Rachel shared that the support she received through these campus-based organizations has significantly impacted her ability to work through difficult situations and persist in college.

Brian also shared that his involvement on campus included participation in student organizations, the Greek Life community, and an on-campus job. Although Brian chose to leave the Greek Life community, he explained that he gained friendships from

the organization and the support he received from a few of the members has also impacted his decision to choose a particular major. Kyle also experienced a high level of campus integration during his first year in college. Through his siblings' experiences, Kyle fully understood the importance of getting involved on campus. Kyle's involvement on campus included becoming an active member in a variety of student organizations, involvement in various campus-based organizations, and engagement in on-campus tutoring support. Kyle explained that he is also in the process of applying for several on-campus positions that would provide him with an even higher level of campus integration.

Much different from the experiences shared by Lynn, Rachel, Brian, and Kyle, Jack and Chris shared a minimal level of involvement in campus-based organizations. Both Jack and Chris were involved in campus athletics, but were required to take a semester off due to a decrease in their cumulative GPAs. Both students shared, however, that their determination to rejoin their teams has impacted their overall motivation to succeed in college. Jack shared this his lack of attendance and involvement in his courses during previous semesters negatively impacted his GPA, however, his goal for the future is to steer his determination in the right direction: "Yeah. Before I didn't want to go to class or anything, but now I'm determined to go to class, 'cause you can fall behind so quick if you don't." Similar to experiences shared by Jack, Chris explained his overall goal for the future is to properly channel his motivation by becoming academically successful: "I want to get a good job after school. I didn't do good those other semesters, but I really think I can move on from that and do a lot better."

Strengths

The use of a narrative-based approach to qualitative research was a major strength of the present study. The current study focused on the use of personal narratives to gain a better understanding of individual experiences, interpretations, and perceptions, which were analyzed with a view to answering the posed research questions. Personal narratives encompass all experiences, ranging from minimal impact to having a significant influence, with each shared experience providing a valuable wealth of knowledge. The researcher strengthened the study by conducting a series of individualized interviews, where the same participants engaged in both the initial and follow-up interview. The present study included analyzing and interpreting a series of personal narratives gathered from six undergraduate students, ranging in age and class standing, all with diverse personal needs. The study also included the interpretation of personal narratives as they related to a wide variety of academic, social, and emotional supports, including secondary education curriculum, postsecondary transition, postsecondary comprehensive support programs, and informal support systems and how these experiences impacted their overall self-determination and academic achievement in higher education. Another strength of the study was the use of inter-rater reliability data to ensure reliable data. The inter-rater reliability, found through general consensus, for the present study was 95.3%, which further supported the report findings.

Limitations

A limitation found in the current study included shared perceptions as a measurement for data analysis. Since the levels of determination and intent to persist

were evaluated based on shared student perceptions, the findings were, at times, difficult to measure. However, the researcher ensured reliable and valid data by completing member checks throughout the course of the study. Although shared perceptions can be difficult to measure, consistency and triangulation between data results confirmed determined codes and reliability of study measures and data results. In order to further support the perceived impact of support services on academic success, the researcher utilized GPAs as a means of measurement. Shared perceptions, use of comprehensive support services and informal support, academic accommodation use, and reported GPAs were analyzed to determine the level of determination, persistence, and academic achievement among student participants. Although the present study was geared towards perceptions shared by students with diagnosed LDs, one student participant (Kyle) was formally diagnosed with educational autism, however, he shared that throughout his educational career, he has experienced challenges in the areas of reading, spelling, writing, and executive functioning. Therefore, the support services offered through Achieve Success provided additional support in order to meet his reading literacy, writing, and executive functioning needs.

This research project was designed and implemented to further explore the perceived influence of secondary and postsecondary education supports on academic success, determination, and persistence among students with LDs. Although the present research strived to account for the impact of varying environmental factors, the influences of culture and personal beliefs were not studied nor taken into account. However, active participation in a religious organization(s) was taken into account. It is

important to note that many students entering the world of postsecondary education come equipped with varying cultural beliefs and attributes that may have a direct impact on academic success and attributed personality traits, such as self-advocacy, self-determination, and persistence (Field & Hoffman, 2012; Field et al., 2003).

Another limitation of the present study was the limited amount of evidence gathered regarding faculty and staff perceptions of postsecondary education transition services and the perceived impact of support services provided in higher education. As outlined in current research, curriculum development has a direct impact on the instruction provided to students in higher education (Field et al., 2003). To further enhance instruction regarding self-advocacy and self-determination development, it is crucial to involve university faculty, staff, and administrators in the planning and implementation process in order to promote and support academic success among all students (Field et al., 2003).

The final limitation presented in the present study included the use of a specific population of students, which limited the sample size. This study aimed to explore the perceived impact of transition and postsecondary education supports on the academic success of students with LDs. The study did not, however, include students with other varying disabilities and instead focused solely on the academic, social, emotional, and interpersonal needs of students diagnosed with LDs, with the exception of Kyle, who was previously diagnosed with educational autism. It is important to note that this current study included students that previously disclosed their disability to University personnel,

completed the program summer transition program, and were receiving mandated accommodations and remedial supports during the duration of this research project.

Implications for Practitioners

Findings from the present study revealed the importance of providing students with LDs with a secondary and postsecondary educational framework that fosters the development of self-advocacy and self-determination skills. As shown throughout the present study, the importance of introducing students to a meaningful and challenging curriculum in high school that focuses on self-initiation and the development of self-advocacy skills is crucial for success in college. The present research also reveals the significant impact receiving postsecondary transition support has on a students' ability to acclimate to campus. Although the present research revealed the importance of providing students with postsecondary education transition support, it is crucial for students to develop the necessary college-level skills far before they enter the transition to college phase. As shown throughout these findings, if students enter the postsecondary transition phase with a limited ability to self-advocate and self-initiate while remaining determined through difficult academic, social, and emotional challenges, they may not be ready for the high-level demands of college. As revealed by previous research, often, students with disabilities are entering the world of higher education lacking the ability to engage in self-advocacy and self-determination. Students frequently enter college with minimal understanding of the importance of goal-setting, self control, diligence, and decision making, which can have a negative impact on their ability to acclimate to college and essentially on their ability to become academically successful at this level. Educators

must see the importance in providing college-bound students, especially those with LDs, with the tools necessary to effectively advocate for their needs. Furthermore, the present study shines a light on the positive impact of informal support services on student success. Educators must also see the importance in providing students with experiences that encourage social integration. As shown in this study, students who shared a stronger sense of emotional and social connection within the institution were linked to a higher level of academic achievement (as indicated by their reported GPAs). At the postsecondary level, it is crucial that support services for students with disabilities encourage students to become involved and integrated in the campus environment while also taking an active role in their education.

Implications for Future Research

The findings outlined in this study provided a strong foundation framework for future research to come. When exploring the impact of instruction-based services and support resources on students' academic achievement in college, future research should examine the influential impact of peer mentoring-based programs in relation to academic success. Previous literature has outlined the impact of peer-mentor support on students' sense of belongingness and social integration in both a high school and college-based setting, however, minimal research lies in the area of the impact of peer mentoring support on academic achievement in regard to persistence and determination in college. Although the present study found that social integration positively impacted academic achievement, future research in this field should aim to determine whether peer-mentoring programs influenced students' persistence levels and determination in college.

Future research should also examine the impact of motivational factors on student success in college. The findings outlined in this study also suggest that future research should examine the impact of personal attributes on the development and utilization of skills crucial to success in college. The present study revealed that personal attributes play a role on students' ability to engage in effective self-advocacy and self-determination skills, but findings suggest a deeper investigation into the significance of these development attributes.

Looking to the Future

The results from the present study confirm the research base in support of the implementation of secondary education curriculums that are meaningful, challenging, and engaging and place a focus on the development of fundamental skills for success in higher education for students with LDs. The results confirm the influential impact of comprehensive support services in higher education on students' ability to adapt to the higher-level college demands. The presented research places a significant emphasis on the importance of informal support systems on student success in both a secondary and postsecondary education setting. Within the present study, findings gathered from personal narratives also outlined the influential impact of a determined mindset to succeed in higher education: "if you don't have determination, practically in every situation, you're not going to achieve it ... your attitude plays a big factor." (Lynn) While looking into the future for students with LDs, it is important to provide instruction that places an emphasis on their individual needs while also providing educational experiences that are rooted in the development of self-advocacy and self-determination, in order for students with disabilities to flourish and achieve academic success in higher education.

APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Research Approval Letter

Date: 1/3/2018
To:
From: Institutional Review Board
Protocol Title: Navigating Higher Education: The Impact of Support Systems for Students with Learning Disabilities
Protocol Number: 973045
Protocol Approval Date: 1/2/2018
Protocol Expiration Date: 1/1/2019

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Participants (IRB), I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved. This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities as outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Your research has been approved as NON-EXEMPT under the following federal category governed by 45 CFR 46.110: Expedited Category 7

Non-exempt research is subject to compliance with federal regulations and University policies regarding the use of human subjects as described in the IRB Application materials. In conducting research under this protocol, the researcher agrees to:

- Submit a [Modification Request Form](#) and secure approval before making any changes to the protocol.
- Submit a [Continuing Review Form](#) prior to the expiration date to extend the protocol beyond the end date.
- Report to the IRB any unanticipated risks to the research subjects or deviations from the procedures as described in the protocol as soon as they are identified.
- Complete an [IRB Closure Form](#) when the research is completed.
- All IRB forms may be found on the [Sponsored Programs and Faculty Development website](#), completed, and sent electronically to
- As required by record retention policy, please retain all research data and signed consent forms for seven years after completion of the study.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

cc: Lacey Beaman

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Document for Students used as Research Population

Informed Consent Document for [REDACTED] Students used as Research Population

Wednesday, December 19

Navigating Higher Education: The Impact of Support Systems for Students with Learning Disabilities

Lacey Beaman

The University [REDACTED] supports the practice of protecting human participants in research. The following information is provided so that you can decide whether you wish to participate in this research study. Your participation is solicited but is strictly voluntary.

The purpose of the study is to further explore the impact of comprehensive student support programs available for students with learning disabilities in postsecondary education. This research will also include an examination of the transitional support services that are available to students transitioning from high school to college and will evaluate how these available services aid in academic success in college. Family attributes and expectations in regard to academic success will also be examined. This research will further examine how postsecondary educational support programs aid in fostering the development and utilization of self-determination and self-advocacy skills while also promoting academic independence. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to share your experiences while participating in a series of individualized interviews. The complete study will take approximately one hour to complete over the course of an eight week timeframe.

Student participants may benefit from participating in this study. Through participation in this study, students may become more self aware of their experiences in special education, personal needs, and specific characteristics of their diagnosed disability. The benefits to knowledge and to society include an increased understanding of the impact of transitional, informal, formal, and collegiate support programs for students with learning disabilities and how these programs affect self-determination, self-advocacy, and persistence. There are only minimal risks that participants might encounter during this study. Students will be challenged to think about and reflect on previous educational and personal experiences regarding their disabilities. Students will be asked to reflect on the impact of their support systems and how those supports have influenced who they are today. Students will be challenged to reflect on the educational, social, emotional, and psychological support that they received throughout their educational careers.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be free to withdraw at any time and will still receive credit for the amount of time spent in the study. If you decide not to participate in this study, please let the researcher know and he or she will excuse you from the study. You do not need to tell the researcher your reasons for choosing not to participate. If you decide to withdraw from the study, any information collected from you up to that point will be destroyed. Your choice to participate or not will have no effect on your relationship with the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.

This present study will utilize a grounded theory approach to qualitative research will be used to gather and analyze the collected data. The research data collection method will include both semi-structured interviews that will be utilized in both a focus group and individualized setting. The same four participants engaged in the focus group interview will also engage in an individualized interview with the researcher. Qualitative data collection measures will be utilized when compiling and analyzing data from the interviews. Once the interviews have been conducted, the data collected will be analyzed and coded. Data will be collected confidentially. All collected data will be properly coded and maintained. Pseudonyms and student codes will be used on all collected data. Electronic data collected will be kept on a password protected computer, and hard copy data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. In presentation or

publication data will be presented in aggregate with no individually identifiable information. We will not release any information about you in any way or form that could identify you.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact:

Lacey Beaman

[Redacted]

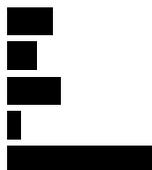
[Redacted]

[Redacted]

If you have any concerns or complaints about your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact:

Chair, Institutional Review Board

[Redacted]



Although the chairperson may ask you for your name, all complaints are kept in confidence.

Consent Statement: By signing the statement below, I am confirming that I am at least 18 years old and have received an explanation of the study. I agree to participate. I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any time.

STUDENT'S PRINTED NAME
DATE

SIGNATURE

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Document for Conducting Audio-Recorded Interviews

Informed Consent Document for Conducting Audio-Recorded Interviews

UNIVERSITY [REDACTED]

Research Participant Information and Consent Form Title of the Study: The Impact of Postsecondary Education Supports: How Students with Learning Disabilities Utilize Support Systems to aid in Academic Success

Principal Investigator: [REDACTED]

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study about the impact of transitional and postsecondary education supports on student success in college. The impact of previous and current support programs on student determination and intent to persist in college will be examined. The goal of the study is to further explore the impact of comprehensive student support programs available for students with learning disabilities in postsecondary education. This research will also include an examination of the transitional support services that are available to students transitioning from high school to college and will evaluate how these available services aid in academic success in college. Family attributes and expectations in regard to academic success will also be examined. This research will further examine how postsecondary educational support programs aid in fostering the development and utilization of self-determination and self-advocacy skills while also promoting academic independence.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

Your participation will include both a focus group interview and an individual interview with the researcher. Both interviews will occur in a private setting within the [REDACTED] office. The focus interview will include all four participants and will last approximately one hour in duration. Following the focus group interview, you will participate in a 45 minute in-person interview with the researcher. Audio recordings will be made of your participation. The audio recordings will be destroyed once the transcription is complete. Data will be analyzed, written up, submitted for publication, and presented at a conference. I may also want to review some of your documents, which could include disability documentation, course syllabi, and/or instructional material.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

This study poses minimal confidentiality risks. No personally identifiable information will be shared outside of the interviews, however with a very small sample size, it is possible participants could be identifiable based on their responses. Risks will be minimized by using pseudonyms in the data, analysis, and any publication to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

Student participants may benefit from participating in this study. Through participation in this study, students may become more self aware of their experiences in special education, personal needs, and specific characteristics of their diagnosed disability. The benefits to knowledge and to society include an increased understanding of the impact of transitional, informal, formal, and collegiate support programs for students with learning disabilities and how these programs affect self-determination, self-advocacy, and persistence.

WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR MY PARTICIPATION?

You will receive a \$25 gift card for participating in this study. If you withdraw prior to the end of the study, you will still receive the \$25 gift card.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

My computer will require a password that only I will know to be entered when it is turned on. I will use pseudonyms in the data, analysis, and any publication to protect the confidentiality of the participants. I will include password protection on documents that have participant data, including recorded or transcribed documents. All audio recordings will be destroyed after seven years following the closure of this research project. Interviews will be conducted in person and in my office in privacy with the door closed. If you participate in this study, we would like to be able to quote you directly using a pseudonym in place of your name. If you agree to allow us to quote you in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Please contact me with any questions about the research, [REDACTED]

If you are not satisfied with response of the research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone independent of the researcher about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Chair:

Chair, Institutional Review Board
For Protection of Human Participants

Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time during the study. Upon the completion of the study, I will be happy to discuss the findings with you if you request to do so.

Sincerely,
Lacey Beaman



CONSENT

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research, and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

_____ I give permission for the interview to be recorded for transcription purposes.

_____ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.

Name of Participant (please print): _____

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

APPENDIX D

Initial Interview Protocol

Initial Interview Protocol

- 1) At what age did you begin receiving documented services?
 - a. Did you have an IEP/504 plan?
 - b. Did you utilize the accommodations available to you?
- 2) When going through this initial process, who do you feel was your biggest advocate/supporter?
- 3) What types of informal (parental, guardian, peer, etc.) supports did you rely on throughout your schooling?
- 4) In high school, did you attend a Transition course that prepared you for the transition from HS to college?
 - a. What was the curriculum like?
 - b. Did the course instruction closely align with the high demands in college?
 - c. Did your teacher assist you in weaning off of the use of specific accommodations that would not be granted in college? (use of notes on exams, exam retakes, etc)?
- 5) Did you attend a transitional program to better prepare you for college?
 - a. If so, where? What was the curriculum/instruction like?
 - b. Were the academic/social/emotional demands different than HS?
 - c. Do you feel like this program better prepared you for college?
- 6) What do you feel prepared you the most for college?
- 7) Once starting college, do you feel like you were prepared for the demands?
- 8) What are some of the biggest challenges you experienced once you entered college?
- 9) Do you feel like your high school curriculum properly prepared you for the transition from HS to college?
 - a. Specific courses designed for this type of instruction?
- 10) Do you currently utilize support programs/systems in college?
 - a. Specific on-campus programs/organizations?
- 11) What PS services (remedial/accommodations) have you previously used?
Currently?
- 12) What types of informal supports do you utilize in college? (parents/guardians, peers, etc.)
- 13) How has PS impacted (supported/hindered) your academic career in higher education?

APPENDIX E

Follow Up Interview Protocol

Follow-Up Interview Protocol

- 1) Previously, you mentioned that you *received/did not* receive instructional support (regarding the college academic demands) in high school, do you feel that these instructional experiences impacted your transition to college experience in a negative or positive way? How so?
 - a. Do you feel that this has impacted your academic achievement in college? How so?
- 2) Previously, you mentioned that you *received/did not* receive additional support services (special education support, aid, program, tutoring, etc.) in high school, do you feel like these services, or lack there of, impacted your transition to college experience in a negative or positive way? How so?
 - a. Do you feel that receiving these additional support services has impacted your academic achievement in college? How so?
 - b. Do you feel that these supports impacted your level of determination and persistence to achieve high grades?
- 3) What crucial skills/strategies did you learn in high school that you still use today?
 - a. Have these skills impacted your success in college? In what ways?
- 4) Previously, you explained that you relied on *multiple/minimal* informal supports in high school; do you feel that the informal support you received impacted your academic achievements in high school in a positive or negative way? How so?
 - a. Do you feel that the informal support you received impacted your level of determination in HS? How so?
 - b. Do you feel that the level of informal support you received impacted your level of persistence when you were faced with a challenging experience in HS? How so?
- 5) Do you feel like the curricular instruction you received in HS impacted the outcome of your first semester/year and how determined (*no lack of/ lack of*) you were to succeed?
- 6) Do you feel that your previous instruction (*or lack of*) in the area of ‘transition to college preparation’ impacted your academic achievements in college? How so?
- 7) Do you feel that your involvement in the PS summer program impacted your transition to college and the outcome of your first semester/year?
- 8) Previously, you mentioned that you relied on *multiple/minimal* informal supports in college; do you feel that the informal support you currently receive has impacted your academic achievements in college?
 - a. Do you feel that the informal support you received impacted your level of determination in HS? How so?
 - b. Do you feel that the level of informal support you received impacted your level of persistence when you were faced with a challenging experience in HS? How so?
- 9) What important skills/strategies did you learn from your informal support systems that you feel have impacted your academic achievements?

- a. If you relied on minimal informal supports in HS, do you feel a higher level of support would have impacted your transition to and success in college?
- 10) When transitioning to college, do you feel that the PS summer program impacted your ability to navigate the academic demands in college?
 - a. Social/emotional demands?
 - b. Environmental demands?
- 11) During our initial interview, you shared that you have a *successful/challenging* first semester. What do you feel impacted your experience?
 - a. You mentioned that the PS summer program aided in your transitional experience- were you able to utilize your developed skills once you entered college? Why or why not?
 - b. Although you were able to utilize these skills, why do you feel your first semester(s) was still challenging? What factors influenced your experience?
- 12) Did your enrollment in the PS summer program/PS program impact your development of self-advocacy skills, independency, determination, and/or persistence? Why or why not? What factors impacted the development of these skills?
- 13) What skills/strategies did you learn from your involvement in the PS summer program/PS program that has impacted your academic achievements thus far? Be specific.
- 14) Previously, you mentioned that the summer program better prepared you for college, but you shared that you experienced a difficult first semester(s), why do you think you experienced this?
- 15) What factors do you feel have impacted your academic persistence in college? For instance, when you hit a roadblock, what keeps you pushing through?
- 16) What factors do you feel have impacted your level of determination in school? What are some strategies/practices you rely on to remain determined and driven in college?
- 17) What motivates you to succeed?
- 18) What does determination and 'grit' mean to you?
- 19) As you progress through college, do you feel like your level of determination increases? What factors do you feel have influenced this?
- 20) What personal attributes do you feel have impacted where you are in college (*successes/challenges*)? What factors have influenced the development of these attributes?

APPENDIX F
Interview Coding Chart

Interview Coding Chart

Student Pseudonym	Lynn	Brian	Rachel	Kyle	Chris	Jack
Current Year	SOPH	JR	FR	FR	SOPH	SOPH
Age	19	21	18	19	20	20
Current Cum. GPA	3.198	2.825	3.435	3.577	1.681	1.846
Probation/Suspension	NO *remained on GS throughout	Pro1 (F'16) Pro 2 (S'17) Pro 3 (F'17)= SUS. (readmit approv.)	Pro 1 (F'17)			
Major	HSL	RTF	Nursing	Geog.	HSL	undecided
Accommodation Use	32 exams	51 exams	33 exams	14 exams	25 exams	26 exams
DIAGNOSIS						
<i>Early (elementary)</i>		+	+	+	+	
<i>Late (HS)</i>	+					+
accommodations received: Elem.-HS	+	+	+	+	+	*informal accommodations
HS CURRICULUM						
preparation for college	+	+(college prep HS)	+(PSCO program)	+	-	-
supported college expectations	+	+(Marcellin Program)	+(Groves Academy)	+(AP Hist. & CAPP Eng.)	-	-
HIGH SCHOOL FORMAL SUPPORT						
use of accommodations	+	+	+	+	+	-
special education courses	+	+	+	+	+	-
tutoring	+	+	+	+	+	+
teacher/aid/counselor support	+	+	+	+	+	+
additional outside support	+	+	+	+	+	-
POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION TRANSITION						
<i>High school transition instruction</i>						
transition courses (in high school)	-	-	+	-	-	-
teacher/aid/ tutor/ counselor transition support	+	+	+	+	+	-
parent transition support	+	+	+	+	-	+

College Transition Program

curriculum prepared for academic demands	+	+	+	+	+	+
felt prepared for the social, emotional, environ. demands	+	+	+	+	+	+
AS staff support	+	+	+	+	+	+
impacted success in college	+	+	+	+	+	+

COLLEGE FORMAL SUPPORT

accommodation use	+	+	+	+	-	-/+
professors	+	+	+	+	-	-/+
tutors	+	+	+	+	-/+	-/-
campus recourses	+	+	+	+	-	-/-
visited prof office hours	+	+	+	+	-	-/-
	(often)		(often)			
additional resources to support academics	+/ (Grammarly & filters)	-/-	+/+ (Kurzweil, Livescribe Pen, SI)	+/+ (SI sessions)	-	-/+
additional resources to support social/emotional	+	+	+	+	-	-
	(counseling)	(therapy)	(counseling)	(counseling)		

AS PROGRAM SUPPORT

staff	+	+	+	+	+	+
time management development	+	+	+	+	-	+
advocacy development	+	+	+	+	-/+	-/+
independency development	+	+	+	+	-/+	-/+
supported the use of accommodations & resources	+	+	+	+	-/+	-/+
engaged in additional PS remedial services	+	+	+	-	-	-
	(Spec Ed 102)	(Math 99)	(Spec Ed 102)			
lab tutoring support	-	-	+	+	-/+	-/+

INFORMAL SUPPORT***High school***

parents	+	+	+	+	-	+
siblings	+	+	+	+	-	-
friends	+	-	+	+	-	-
peers	+	-	+	+	-	-
mentor	-	-	-	+	-	-
organization/club	+	-	+	+	-	-

College

parents	+	+	+	+	-	+
siblings	+	+	+	+	-	-
friends	+	+	+	+	+	+
peers	+	+	+	+	+	+
mentor	-	-	-	+	-	-
coworkers	+	+	-	-	-	-
organization/club	+	+	+	+	+	+

CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT

organization/club	+	+	+	+	-	-
athletics	-	-	-	-	+/- (removed from team due to low grades)	+/- (removed from team due to low grades)
religious-based affiliations	+	-	+	-	-	-

ACADEMIC SKILLS

study strategies	+	+	+	+	-/+	-/+
	(Quizlet, rewriting notes)		(Quizlet)	(notecards)	(poor study habits-now utilizing notes to study)	(studying more often-now utilizing notes to study)
study environment	+	+	+	+	-	-/+
	(library, Reeve)	(Study buddy-library)	(study buddy-library)		(study tables- used time poorly)	
time management	+	+	+	+	-/+	-/+
organization	+	+	+	+	+	+
prioritizing	+	+	+	+	-	- (procrastinate)
decision making	+	+	+	+	-	+/-
				(roles in student organizations)		
engages in goal setting	+	+	+	+	-/+	-/+
shared a lack of	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES

motivation						
ATTRIBUTES						
identify as determined	+	+	+	+	-	+
social engagement	- (challenge)	+	+	+	+	+
					(negative impact on academics)	(negative impact on academics)
anxiety	+	-	-	+	+	+
stress management techniques	+	+	+	+	-	-
		(therapy)	(counseling, music, exercise)	(private testing area)		
ADVOCACY						
High School						
independency	+	+	+	+	+	+
developed strong advocacy skills	+	+	+	+	-	-
utilized skills	+	+	+	+	-	-
others advocated for needs	+	-	-	-	+	+
struggled with advocacy	-	-	-	-	+	+
College						
independency	+	+	+	+	-	-
developed strong advocacy skills	+	+	+	+	-	-
utilized skills	+	+	+	+	-	-
others advocated for needs	+	-	-	-	-	-
struggled with advocacy	+	-	-	-	+	+

PERCEIVED DETERMINATION

determined to succeed	+	+	+	+	-/+ (lack of drive- feels he can move forward)	-/+
states motivators	+	+	+	+	+	+
determination level impacted by:	Friends' successes	Sees school as a job something he can prove "there is something I can improve" parents peers	Become a nurse high GPA	To develop diff skills Motivated to learn Leadership role Influence of coach in HS	*lacked motivation in previous semesters Prove people wrong Previously lacked follow through Wants good job after school Believes he needs to utilize his determination Not taking advantage of resources to succeed, mindset- not mentally prepared)	*lacked motivated in previous semesters Hockey Determined to go to class so he doesn't fall behind Procrastination led to low achievement Lack of motivation after failure, wasn't mentally prepared FR year) Need to change my mindset
believes determination levels have impacted (negatively or positively) their success in college	+	+	+	+	+	+
THEMES						
impact of HS Curriculum	+		+	+	+	
<i>underprepared in certain areas</i>			+	+	+	
			("bubble")	(lack of prep for college in some courses)		
impact of formal supports in HS/college	+		+	+	+	
impact of summer	+		+	+	+	

program				
<i>underprepared in certain areas</i>	+	+	+	
	(summer program still different than college)	(disability disclosure)	(campus involvement)	
impact of program support on college success	+	+	+	+
				(lacked action)
development of determination	+	+	+	+
impact of personal attributes on college success	+	+	+	+
independency in HS/college	+		+	+
disability identity	+	+		
factors impacting academic success in college	+	+	+	+
advocacy in college		+	+	+

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