

# Supporting the Academic Needs of Students in Higher Education: A Collaboration between Occupational Therapy and Disability Services

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## Introduction

### Background:

Time is often reported by students in postsecondary education as a barrier to academic success. For individuals with challenges to learning, time can place an even greater demand on students' performance. The contribution of the occupational therapist as a resource to a postsecondary academic support team can facilitate the development of productive habits and daily routines necessary for a successful college experience for students seeking accommodations through Access and Disability Services.

### Purpose:

- Contribute information supporting factors that influence the academic success of students seeking accommodations in postsecondary education to the body of knowledge in occupational therapy and higher education
- Seek a better understanding based on student experience how an individual's habits and daily routines, associated with time spent in activities related to their role as a college student within a typical day, supports a balance of activities necessary to foster the success of students with disabilities in postsecondary education

### Aim of the Study:

- The purpose of this study is to explore how temporal factors influence student performance from the perspective of undergraduate students experiencing challenges to learning

## Literature Review

### Legislative Support for Postsecondary Education

- "In the postsecondary setting, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act protects students from being denied admission due to a disability, however; it is the student's responsibility to disclose this disability in order to have access to accommodations" (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).
- "Accommodations typically received include priority registration, lower course load, changing one course for another, having a note taker, extra test time, and use of assistive devices. These accommodations do not include modifying and or changing content or course curriculum for a specific student" (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

### Student Perception of Need for Support Services

- "Many students chose to not identify as having a disability. Those students reported that it was due to the stigma that they felt it would place on them; and they wanted to try to manage their academics on their own" (Timmerman, 2015).
- "Students further reported that being required to disclose their need for services to the professors as another reason that held them back from accessing services as they are not able to confidentially seek services they may need to be successful in their endeavors" (Timmerman, 2015).
- "Approximately 35% of students receiving postsecondary accommodations feel that they are still lacking support to help them be successful in their academic endeavors" (Timmerman, 2015).

### Facilitation Student-Centered Service

- "Creating a student centered classroom focused on the student's value and skills; increases independence and improves overall academic success" (Richmond, Rademacher and Maitland, 2014).
- "The use of coaching in education, enables instructors and students to collaborate and initiate the creative problem-solving skills necessary to meet their academic goals" (Richmond, Rademacher and Maitland, 2014).

### Opportunities for Interprofessional Collaboration

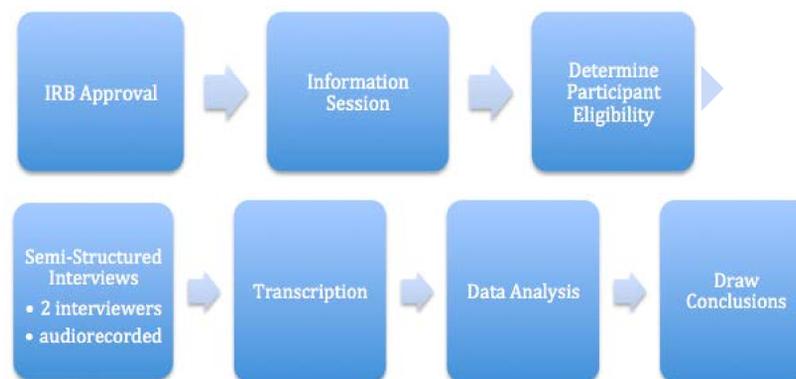
- "The overarching barrier is that college students with disabilities have difficulty adjusting to the academic, psychological, and social demands of college life (Lombardi, 2016).
- "The contribution of occupational therapy to coaching in education, is a way for occupational therapist, and [educational] leaders, alike to unlock their [students] potential while the individual becomes more self-sufficient" (Bungay Stainer, 2016).
- "During the transition to higher education, occupational therapists "coaching students on the development of productive habits and daily routines that promote effective organization, time management, social interaction, and other skills necessary for postsecondary education success"" (AOTA, 2013 p.2)

## Methodology

**Research Design:** Interpretive phenomenological qualitative study

**Convenient Sample of Participants:** Students ages 18-28 enrolled in postsecondary education at Elmhurst College who receive services through Access and Disability Services. Students must have a high school diploma or GED and qualify under Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, ADA Amendments Act of 2008, or the Bridge program.

## Procedure

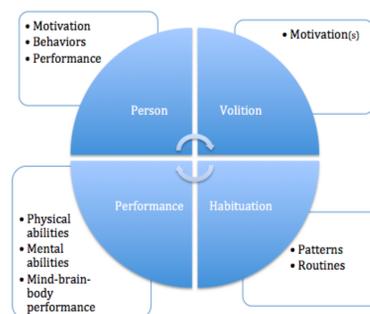


### Interview Questions: Core Topics

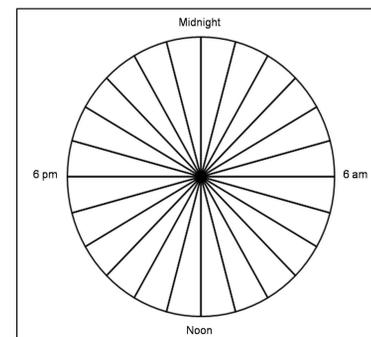
- Educational history
- Values, vocational interest and cultural influences
- Daily schedule
- Occupation and life roles
- Life balance

## Data Collection Tools

### Model Guiding Research: Model of Human Occupation (MOHO)



### Balance Wheel



## Data Analysis

Thematic Interpretive Approach



## Results

Results will be determined through semi-structured interviews with students receiving Access & Disability services at Elmhurst College, which will then be transcribed by the researchers. The information gathered in the interviews will be transcribed and then analyzed to form the results for this study.

## Conclusions

Through an extensive literature review it was found that student's needs in a post secondary setting are not always met even when services are available and utilized. This interpretive phenomenological qualitative study was carried out to obtain a better understanding of student needs in relation to overall academic performance. After collecting and analyzing results from this study the researchers hope to demonstrate evidence to support the use of occupational therapy in community-based academic settings while adding to the body of knowledge for the profession.

## Limitations

Within this study there were several limitations. The sample size of only three participants provided limited information. This research was conducted in one region, and therefore cannot be generalized to all occupational therapists. Practice setting differed between school and home. There was a varied wide span of experience between participants. This study is a quantitative phenomenological study, which limits the research because it is based off of interviewee information, like thoughts and feelings, which can be difficult to express for some. The credibility and reliability may be questionable due to the type of study.

## Implications for Practice

A main focus of the AOTA Vision 2025 is to expand occupational therapy services on an individual, population, and community level in order to make a bigger impact with our unique expertise. The researchers hope the results of this study can provide support for occupational therapy services in a post secondary community setting where it is not currently being utilized. Furthermore, that this data will show the benefit of occupational therapy services for the individual students, the coordinators, and the organization as a whole. This research was client-centered by getting a better understanding of the individual student's lives and areas of need to enable better academic engagement.

## References

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