

Abstract: Returning to Learn after Concussion: A Phenomenological Investigation of University Student Experiences

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Sports-related concussions have become an area of intense research focus on college campuses, but many students who sustain concussions are not athletes and do not have access to screening, diagnosis and management provided by sideline athletic trainers and sports medicine physicians. Car or bicycle accidents, falls from bunk beds or while socializing with friends, and injuries from intramural sports or informal sporting activities are just a sample of mechanisms of concussion in the general student population. Following an injury, these students must navigate care pathways on campus or in the community while dealing with the cognitive, physical, sensory, and sleep disturbances associated with concussion. Although most of these students, like their athlete counterparts, are expected to make full recoveries, difficulties returning to the classroom and managing an academic course load in the short term are frequently reported but poorly characterized or understood.

The current project proposes a qualitative phenomenological study examining the return to learn experiences of college students on the University of Georgia campus, responding to a need both within the research literature, as well as needs reported by the Disability Resource Center and the Office of Student Care and Outreach to better understand and support the growing population of students with concussion seeking care on campus. Students will participate in a semi-structured interview exploring the lived experience of managing their care and academics after concussion. Interviews will be collected and coded to thematic saturation with an anticipated sample size of 10 to 15 participants.

Results will be used to improve care pathways and education about academic effects of concussion on campus as well as inform future research into identifying student academic needs and providing appropriate supports.