

Trends in Disability Disclosure and Accommodation Use among College Students with Learning and Attention Disorders

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An ongoing collaborative investigation of the use of extended time testing accommodations by students with hidden disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, and psychological disorders [e.g., depression, anxiety]) at the UGA Disability Resource Center (DRC) recently found that only 3% of tests taken with extended time were taken by freshmen. This striking finding suggested that students who are eligible to use disability services at UGA are not accessing them during their first year of attendance.

As research has indicated that students with disabilities who seek services earlier perform better academically than students who postpone services (Lightner, Kipps-Vaughan, Schulte, & Trice, 2012), and given that graduation rates for students with disabilities fall far below those of students without disabilities (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; National Council on Disability, 2015; Newman et al., 2011; Snyder & Dillow, 2015), identification of the barriers to disability service use is imperative to the objectives of retention and graduation for students with disabilities. Whereas it could be that freshman students with disabilities are registering for disability services but are finding that they do not need to use them until later in their UGA tenure, more likely scenarios implicate informational, psychological, and socially constructed barriers to service access.

The purpose of the proposed project is to investigate when students with learning disabilities, Attention - Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder, and/or psychological disorders at UGA seek services at the Disability Resource Center and what factors influence the timing of their decision to do so. Further, we plan to investigate the subsequent frequency of test accommodation use at the Disability Resource Center and the factors that influence use patterns.

The findings of the study will inform steps to increase service use with the long-term objectives of improving the campus climate for students with disabilities and increasing retention and graduation for students with hidden disabilities.