

Outcomes of OT-Led Coaching to Support the Success of Students With Disabilities in Higher Education

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PURPOSE: Students with disabilities at institutions of higher education (IHE) graduate at lower rates than students without disabilities (Houtenville & Boege, 2019). Coaching, and specifically occupational therapy-led (OT) coaching, has been found to be a promising intervention to support the academic success of students with disabilities (Boney et al., 2019; Harrington et al., 2021). However, only Boney et al. (2019), in their pilot study, has investigated the degree to which students with disabilities make progress towards self-identified goals through OT-led coaching and no study has yet investigated whether the strategies identified by students are being used and perceived to be helpful. Therefore, this study was conducted to: (1) estimate the degree to which students with disabilities who receive OT-led coaching met their self-identified academic and living goals, (2) explore the types of goals that students with disabilities identified, explore the types of strategies that students with disabilities identified and attempted to achieve their goals, and (3) estimate the degree to which self-identified strategies were attempted and helpful.

DESIGN: A mixed methods study was conducted to evaluate these outcomes. All students receiving services through the accessibility office of a mid-Atlantic private university were eligible for the study. Students were screened using a questionnaire that identifies needs not met by traditional IHE supports. Students with unmet needs were contacted and 39 students participated in OT-led coaching across seven semesters with 30 consenting to be part of the study.

METHOD: Goal attainment scaling (GAS) was used to determine the degree of progress that students made towards their goals and the types of goals students identified. OT session notes, which included the list of identified strategies, whether they were attempted, and their helpfulness, were used to quantify the degree to which students attempted strategies, the helpfulness of the strategies, and the types of strategies identified. All ratings were self-reports. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the goals, whether strategies were attempted, and the helpfulness of the strategies. Qualitative content analysis using inductive coding was used to categorize the types of goals and strategies identified.

RESULTS: Of the 88 identified goals, 77% were rated as "goal met" (GAS score ≥ 0) and 93% improved to a degree deemed clinically significant (a 1-point or greater change in GAS score). Time management was the type of goal identified most often (40%). A total of 1,123 strategies were identified and 69% (777) were attempted. Of the attempted strategies 68% were rated as helpful (score of ≥ 4 out of 5). The strategies were coded into 22 categories that were grouped into three themes: (1) supports, (2) academic responsibilities, and (3) adulting.

CONCLUSION: OT-led coaching is an effective approach in supporting goal attainment for students with disabilities. Furthermore, the strategies identified in coaching sessions are perceived as helpful and are used by students to achieve their goals. Categorizing the types of strategies that students identified builds an understanding of the breadth of strategies that OT practitioners can use to support students with disabilities at IHE.

IMPACT STATEMENT: OT is a rare service in IHE. However, this research and previous studies (Boney et al., 2019; Harrington et al., 2021) show that OT using a coaching model is a valuable in supporting the academic success of students with disabilities.

References

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