

# Students With Disabilities' Perceptions of OT-Led Coaching in Postsecondary Education

Marie-Christine Potvin, PhD, OTR/L<sup>1</sup>, Gabriella Santos, OTD, OTR/L<sup>2</sup>, Erin Harrington

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States; <sup>2</sup>Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation, Chester, New Jersey, United States

DOI: 10.5014/ajot.2022.76S1-PO198

Date presented: April 1, 2022

Primary Author and Speaker: Marie-Christine Potvin, [mcpotr@gmail.com](mailto:mcpotr@gmail.com)

**PURPOSE:** More students with disabilities than ever are enrolling in postsecondary education (PSE) institutions, however, their poor degree progression, retention, and graduation rates, suggest that they may not be adequately supported by their academic institutions (Keptner & McCarthy, 2020). The GOALS2 program, an occupational therapy (OT)-led coaching program offered at a PSE has been found, in a pilot study, to be efficacious at supporting students in achieving their self-identified goals. (Boney et al., 2019; Harrington et al., 2021). However, an analysis of participants' perception of what, within the program, is beneficial was necessary to understanding the value and social validity of this approach with PSE.

**METHOD:** A phenomenological study was conducted with 18 students with disabilities who received the coaching intervention in their PSE. Data was collected through individual semi-structured qualitative interviews that were conducted at the end of each academic semester to gain an understanding of students with disabilities' perceptions of the services received. These interviews were transcribed verbatim using a transcription protocol and the transcriptions were checked for accuracy. A multi-step, multi-coder, open-coding approach was used with the transcribed interviews. Inter-rater reliability was established through a thorough multi-step process that involved independent coding, comparison of codes, discrepancy resolution as needed, combining codes, adding codes, or redefining a code. This process was repeated until all the codes and definitions were applied reliably by all coders (n = 3).

**RESULTS:** Four themes emerged from the data: the personal (e.g., eating "right", exercising and talking to my therapist) and academic growth achieved (e.g., grade improvement), the benefits of an open and supportive environment within the coaching program (e.g., a "safe spot"), the participants' perceptions of self-identified goal achievement (e.g., "the goals help me strive to meet something," and the importance of accountability and engagement (e.g., people should have to commit to participating). Overall, participants reported perceiving the OT-led coaching approach as beneficial to them and described in what manner it was helpful.

**CONCLUSION:** Students with disabilities in the PSE institution perceived the OT-led coaching as beneficial to their academic and personal successes. The comments that these students made about coaching suggest that the approach was perceived to be valid in the context of PSE.

**IMPACT STATEMENT:** This study is the first to ascertain whether OT-led coaching is perceived as beneficial by PSE students with disabilities. The role of OT as a service provider in PSE was perceived by these students as meeting unmet needs.

## References

- Keptner, K. M., & McCarthy, K. (2020). Mapping Occupational Therapy Practice with Postsecondary Students: A Scoping Review. *The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 8(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.15453/2168-6408.1617>
- Boney, J., Potvin, M.-C., & Chabot, M. (2019). The GOALS2 Program: Expanded supports for students with disabilities in postsecondary education. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 32(3).
- Harrington\*, E., Santos\*, G., & Potvin, M.-C. (2021). Students' Perceptions of Occupational Therapy-led Coaching in Post-secondary Education. *Open Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 9(2), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.15453/2168-6408.1790> [\*Shared 1st authorship]