

# Identifying Transitional Information Needs of College Students with Learning Disabilities and Attention Disorders

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## Background

- Students with disabilities have lower postsecondary completion rates than their peers in the general population<sup>1</sup>.
- Particularly at risk are students with Learning and Attention Disorders (L/AD), which make up almost half the population of students with disabilities in college<sup>2</sup>.
- These students face challenges in managing diagnostically-related needs and accessing supports, which have been linked to college success<sup>3</sup>.

This research characterizes the information needs of college students with L/AD in supporting them.

## Methods

- Fifty-two undergraduates with L/AD registered with the campus disability office were enrolled as part of a larger four-year study testing campus-based supports for L/AD.
- Participants met monthly in groups to receive L/AD-related educational content and engage in discussion.
- Participant engaged research methods were applied and a **continuous improvement approach** was used to determine and refine educational topics.
- This retrospective study used thematic and content analysis of qualitative data from 30 group meetings.
- Data were transcripts of the group discussions, discussion prompts, and educational material provided in the four-year study.
- First cycle coding identified categories and patterns in the educational and discussion content salient to the study participants.
- Second cycle coding identified the frequency of topics during the four year period.

## Results

Table 1. Count of Topics by Transition Stage

Topics	Transition In	Transition Through	Transition Out	Non-Specific
Accommodations	0	13	4	2
Advocacy	0	22	0	11
Anticipatory Guidance in Guest Speakers	0	0	0	4
Assistive Technology	0	4	0	0
Big Picture Thinking	0	25	0	0
Communication	0	17	3	6
Disability in the Workforce	0	1	6	4
Executive Function in Real Life	0	4	1	4
<b>General Strategies</b>	1	67	0	8
<b>Health &amp; LD Symptom Literacy</b>	1	21	0	59
<b>Health Behaviors</b>	7	41	0	12
Imparting Wisdom for Students	0	1	1	1
LD-ADD Differences	0	19	0	8
Mentorship	0	2	0	3
Misconceptions	0	8	0	7
Relationships	0	0	0	2
Self-Efficacy	0	6	0	8
Strengths & Weaknesses	0	10	0	9
<b>Stress</b>	0	38	0	7
<b>Time Management</b>	0	50	0	2
University Resources	0	7	0	1

## Transitioning In

Recognizing new demands within a college setting

## Transitioning Through

Managing the new demands throughout the college experience

## Transitioning Out

Applying knowledge to future demands in anticipated settings

"What makes a good tutor for someone with LD?" -Moderator

"How do you borrow [time]?" -U21

"If you do need to work longer hours, how does that [accommodations] come into play with salary negotiations and things like that?" -U11

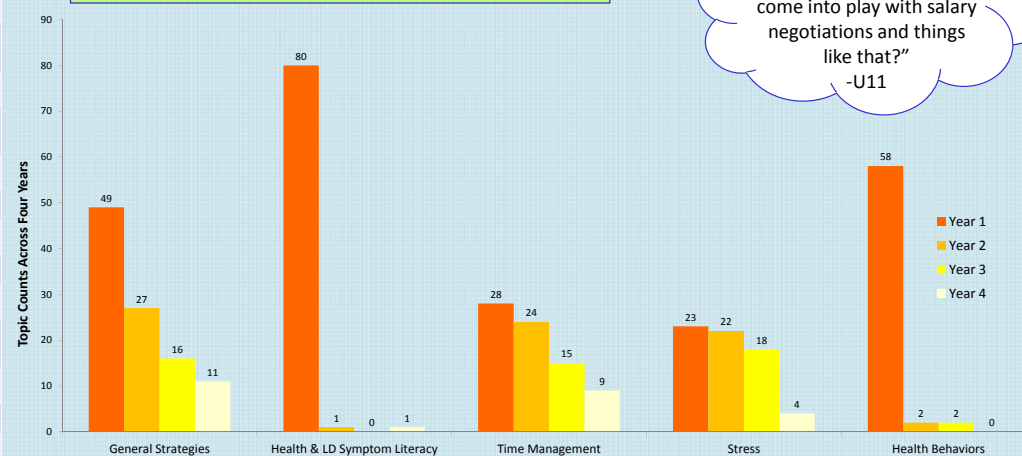


Figure 1. Top 5 Occurring Topic Counts Across Four Years

## Discussion

- We found that managing demands **throughout** the college setting had the greatest endorsement from participants, however many current transition interventions focus on preparing students with disabilities for attending college by focusing on the transitioning in process.
- Content related to viewing L/AD as a disorder was heavy in the first year, however based on the continuous improvement model, topics shifted from focus on L/AD as a disorder to focus on L/AD as a difference in learning and experiences.
- This is a preliminary analysis. Transcripts from the undergraduate discussions will better inform the eventual development of the intervention.

## Conclusion

As the needs of students' with L/AD evolve throughout the college experience, pertinent knowledge and guidance must also evolve in order to best guide and support them through the progressive transitional stages of college. Results explicate a framework for supporting students with disabilities who are enrolled in college.  
**Public Health and/or Health Professions Relevance:**  
Understanding how students with L/AD's needs evolve throughout their college experience is important in developing interventions for them.

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