Understanding the factors that lead to college success among Alumni with self-reported Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

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Background
- Seven percent of school children live with Attention Deficit & Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)\(^1\)
- Although ADHD often persists throughout adulthood, little is known about its impacts on college students
- Results from studies on ADHD & postsecondary education reveal how college demands can place students with ADHD at risk for psychological & academic difficulties\(^1,2\)

This is of particular concern to the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), where many of the students who present for assistance through the Department of Disability Services indicate limitations related to learning, reading, concentrating, listening, & thinking.

Methods
- Participant Recruitment: Flyer posted on UAF Alumni Association website & Facebook, & UAF academic department listservs
- Data collection: Semi-structured, telephone interviews (N=7)
- Interviews audio-recorded, or notes taken
- Interview questions focused on: People, places, & things that facilitated success, & advice would give to UAF students with ADHD & UAF faculty/administration

Study Goal
To gain perspectives from UAF Alumni living with ADHD about the factors that lead to their college success

Theoretical Framework
The research was informed by the Social Ecological Model (SEM). SEM recognizes the reciprocal relationships existing between an individual’s & his or her environments\(^3\)

Factors that influence wellbeing can be organized into ecological levels including:
- Individual (e.g., knowledge, attitudes, experiences)
- Relational (e.g., interpersonal relationships, support)
- Organizational/Community (e.g., social climate, norms, regulations, built structures)

Understanding the facilitators & barriers that are within & external to the individual enhances the viability to address the factors that put students with ADHD at risk for non-retention, physical & emotional harm.

Study Skills
- Study skill strategies (e.g., breaking up chapters, recording key words)
- Write things down to remember
- Re-taking (developmental, remedial) classes

Advice offered to students living with ADHD
- Don’t be afraid to seek help
- Take small steps
- Break down assignments into chunks
- Prioritize your schedule in advance
- Manage your stress
- Keep active & engaged in the community/university

More Findings
- Social Support: Parents, encouragement, high expectations, a place to live & focus on school
- Other Family: siblings at school & home
- Others: Roommates, other friends, fraternity brothers

Advice provided to faculty / administration
- Be: Open & understanding to student needs
- Aware & knowledgeable about resources
- Ensure: Students know about services offered
- Course work & expectations are clear
- Allow: Recordings for note taking
- Allow for breaks during longer classes

Social Support
- “That list was my life. Do not take away my list.”

Data Analysis
- Interviews lasted 45-90 minutes
- Interview recordings & notes were coded (question by question) using Content Analysis
- Constant comparison enabled conclusions to be drawn across participants

Discussion/Implications
- Participants discussed facilitators to success found at all 3 social-ecological levels (individual, relational, and organization/community). Still, participants required prompting to share positive factors that were internal to themselves

- Implications: Programs & services for students with ADHD should highlight their own strengths & strategies

- Factors were categorized into social-ecological levels. Nevertheless, most important is the reciprocal relationship among factors & levels – as change on one level will impact change at other levels

- Implications: Programs & services should target change at multiple ecological levels

Every participant described how the smaller, supportive atmosphere of the UAF community served as a factor of success

- Implications: UAF can promote & accentuate this factor for other students who might be at risk

- All Participants attributed their success, in part, to those professors, staff, & administrators who provided support & understanding. Still, participants recounted encounters with non-supportive individuals who posed barriers to success

- Implications: UAF faculty, staff & administrators should be recognized for their positive impacts on students with ADHD. Educational opportunities might be offered to promote & ensure the supportive UAF community.

Next Steps

- Findings will be shared & interpreted with participants via a Findings Forum offered using telephone & Google Hangout.
- The study will be written up for submission to a peer-review journal

References
2. Wolf, 2006

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UAF Alumni with self-reported Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

“Success is not only about getting your degree but being balanced socially, mentally, & physically. Get engaged in all UAF has to offer.”

“Professors are a big indicator of success. Be open & understanding”

UAF Health & Counseling Center
TRIO Tutoring
Social Support
Living with family
Individual
Study skills
Staying organized
Stress Management
Medical lists
Re-taking classes

UAF Disability Services
UF Student Rec Center
Interpersonal
Professors who were open & knowledgeable

Others’ expectations
Study buddies
List Making
Staying current
Rely on syllabi
Make running “To-Do” lists for day/week

Organizational/Community Student Activities/Groups